

# NEWCITY



Cover design by Jerad Koskey  
www.jeradkoskey.com

**Correction:**  
The photo in the music section of the January 1 issue labeled "The Life and Times" is actually of Pelican. Newcity regrets the error.

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# chow



—THE EDUCATION OF A SMOQUE MASTER

## I 'Que

By Michael Nagrant

**DESPITE THE APPARENT LIABILITY OF BEING A SKINNY JEWISH KID FROM EVANSTON**, Barry Sorkin is one of the smoked-pork (and beef) kings of Chicago. In just a few short years, Sorkin and his BBQ joint Smoque in Irving Park have proven you don't have to be a

grizzled soul man or a beer-bellied Nascar, Jesus-lovin' southerner to make good 'que. Some would-be haters, however, contend that Sorkin's only successful because he's a white dude who opened a good rib shack in the relatively affluent North Side of the city where the media pays attention.

I can't tell you about the lust in other journalist's hearts. But know, when I laud Sorkin, that I've forded almost every rib shack from Evanston to Orland Park and eaten 'que off an environmental-nightmare's worth of Styrofoam clamshell boxes.

He is truly the Eminem of Chicago BBQ, i.e., though Sorkin's a white dude in an African-American-dominated industry, he's successful because he's got mad skills, not because of the color of his skin. Like Eminem, who earned his way to the top, not as a record-industry-driven construct (can you say Vanilla Ice?), but by toppling a series of MCs in underground battles, Sorkin has silenced his critics with lacquered spicy bark ribs and moist, tender and delightfully piquant pulled pork.

And if they start talking smack after chewing through that, all they have to do is wolf down the best brisket maybe this side of Austin: meltingly tender chunks of beef mixed with deep caramelized molasses-rich burnt ends kissed with a tinge of tomato and sweet aromatic spice. The thing about BBQ is if you slide a slab of ribs with the wrong kind of rub down the wrong side of a picnic table in the wrong city, you could start WWII. In these circumstances Sorkin's brisket would broker the peace treaty. (It must be noted though that Robert Adams of Honey 1 is the Jay Z to Sorkin's Eminem and smokes maybe the best ribs in the city.)

What makes all of this success crazy is that Sorkin was a career changer, an account executive for an IT Firm that supported restaurant point-of-sale computer systems. As a weekend warrior, a backyard-kettle-smoker prince, he'd always had it in the back of his mind he wanted to open a restaurant.

So, while he was still working in corporate America he entered the cooking certificate program at Kendall College. He says he'd work ten-hour days at his job, hop on the Kennedy, and like Clark Kent in the phone booth, would change into his chef's whites while driving down to class. Ironically, he could never get into the BBQ class at Kendall, because it was one of the first to fill up.

He says culinary school gave him the confidence to operate in a commercial kitchen, how to make food not just for seven or eight people in the backyard, but to prepare food for hundreds. That confidence was key to persevering through a process that was ready to break him down. Sorkin says that when he approached various business advisors about opening up a BBQ joint, they all laughed and told him not to, that the restaurant business was a surefire way to fail.

Now that his restaurant is successful, Sorkin still looks to culinary-school grads because more often than not they have the fortitude working the line and don't get freaked out about the velocity of a busy night.

Sorkin says, however, that you don't have to go to culinary school. He'd rather have someone who pays attention to how things taste and look, and folks who are willing to speak up when something seems out of whack, which has more to do with personality than schooling. He says that when people ask for career advice, he suggests that working in a restaurant might be the way to get better experience sometimes.

But, that aside, going to culinary school may have provided the biggest boost to face down the biggest critic of all: his wife. When asked how he really got in to the BBQ business, Sorkin says, "You sit down with your wife and you say, 'What do you think about me quitting my cushy high-paying job and going in the world's riskiest business?'" Thankfully she believed.

*Smoque BBQ, 3800 North Pulaski, (773)545-7427*

# words

## READINGS

—THU/8

### Joan Corwin

The author reads from "Safe Shall Be My Going."  
*Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.*

—FRI/9

### Kim Bobo

The author discusses "Wage Theft in America."  
*Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.*

### →The2ndHand #30 Release Party

Featuring contributors Spencer Dew, Jill Summers, YZ Chin, C.T. Ballentine.  
*Quimby's, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.*

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