

RANDY WRIGHT
Goldie's Trail Barbecue — Vicksburg, MS

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Location: Goldie's Trail Barbecue — Vicksburg, MS
Interviewer: Meghan Leonard
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Length: 46 minutes
Project: Southern BBQ Trail

[Begin Randy Wright Interview]**0:00:01****Meghan Leonard:** Take two. This is Meghan Leonard on Saturday, June 12th at 9:37.**0:00:06****Randy Wright:** Was I offering too much information?**0:00:07**

ML: No, that was perfect. That was the kind of thing I want to hear. I’m sitting here with Mr. Randy Wright. We’re talking about Goldie’s Trail Barbecue in Vicksburg. And I’m going to have to ask you to state your name and oppu—oppu—okay, we’re going to get this right--occupation one more time.

0:00:21**RW:** Okay, we got it going now.**0:00:24****ML:** It’s rolling now.**0:00:25****RW:** Randy Wright. Goldie’s Trail Barbecue. I’m—restaurant entrepreneur. Okay.**0:00:34**

ML: If you could backtrack a little and tell me more about how Goldie’s came into your existence—your possession, rather. It was in existence since 1960, how it came to be your restaurant.

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RW: Okay. In 1949 Goldie came to Vicksburg from Missouri to help build the—the bridge over the Big Black River down in—south of Warren County. Well, that's where my family was from. He met my daddy's sister. They got married and decided that they wanted to open up a restaurant. Well, he was from Missouri, she was from Mississippi. They decided they would settle in Arkansas. They opened up a little place called the Mountain View Inn in Wavelen, Arkansas. It was the only thing in Wavelen. But it was right at the turnoff to Blue Mountain Dam and lake. It was a liquor store and a restaurant combined. In 1959 the county voted to go dry so he figured without the liquor business he wouldn't be able to make it. So he sold out and they moved to Vicksburg, opened up Goldie's in November 1960 on the Mississippi River.

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Well, he—he had it from 1960 to 1980. Aunt Hattie died in about 1975, and he—he ran it for five years after that. Finally called me on my phone one day, I was working for the telephone company. I'd been there about nine years. He said, "Randy, you're the only relative that I have that I feel like can take this restaurant and make it work so either you come get it or I'm going to sell it back." So April 1st, 1980 I got into the restaurant business. Here it is, 2010, I'm still doing it.

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ML: Why do you think that he chose you in particular? Why he thought that you were the perfect relative to operate Goldie's?

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RW: Well, I'm not sure that he thought I was the perfect relative, but—but I had helped him off and on. I helped him when Aunt Hattie died, I—I was kind of his—his mainstay

over the years. More relationship with him than—than the rest of my family the whole time he was married to my aunt. So—I—I don’t know, I think he was just grabbing at straws, wondering if I would actually leave the telephone company and come do it and—and keep it going. As—as—as it turned out, it worked out good.

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ML: How long were you at the telephone company before you came to Goldie’s?

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RW: Nine years.

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ML: Do you ever regret leaving the telephone company, or do you love working at Goldie’s?

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RW: Absolutely not. I—the phone company was a good job, especially for me because all I have a high school education, and there’s no way that I could have afforded my family, the things that I have in the last 30 years on a telephone company salary. And—and I’ve always been a people person. So it worked out good for me.

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ML: Can you tell me about the earlier locations of Goldie’s? Like you were saying there’s one down by the Mississippi—if you could elaborate on those a little bit.

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RW: Right. The—the first Goldie’s was a little small white building that actually used to be a White Castle hamburger stand in St Louis Missouri. It was overlooking the Mississippi River. It was brought in here on a railroad car by Mr. L.C Latham who

owned Rose Oil Company here and opened up as the Rosette Grill in 1949. And—and ten years later is when Goldie got it but it had been a little small grill attached to—to a truck stop and basically where it was was where the old Highway 80 used to cross the Mississippi River. Well, in 1983—or in '82 Goldie passed away and Mr. Latham passed away at the same time so the people who actually bought the 500 foot of frontage on the River came in and told us when our lease was up we had to move. And our lease was up in 1984 so a year—about a year and a half after we—after Goldie passed away, we—we had to actually pick up roots and—and move and we had been there for, you know, 23 years. I figured the—the best thing to do was stay as close to that location as we possibly could so we basically picked up and moved right across the street. Built a new building, got an SBA loan, got a new building, and we were in it for 23 years, and at the end of those 23 years, AmeriStar Casino actually bought us out. When they did, we took the money and came over on Frontage Road, bought a lot, spent all that money, and built another one.

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I'm not really sure how smart that is with the economy the way it is and the way things are going now. Mom and Pops are—are—are falling by the wayside pretty quick.

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ML: How do you think—you were just talking about mom and pop stores, and I really look at this restaurant as a family establishment. Do you think that's part of the appeal of Goldie's, why you have such a strong following in Vicksburg? That it's more of a family-style restaurant as opposed to a chain?

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RW: Oh, absolutely. You know, people—people that drive up and down the highway, it's hard for them to just stop at a local restaurant because they're—they're just unfamiliar with it. And there's so many chains out there. So, you—you have to build a good local following at a Mom and Pop if you're going to survive. And then try to draw as much as what you possibly can with tourists and highway traffic. But if you don't have that mainstay of local people, as a Mom and Pop, you're just not going to make it. This is—this is an old tried and true Mom and Pop. When you come in here, you actually get to see the owner of the establishment. You actually get to shake his hand. You actually get to say “Hello.” None of the chains that you go to do you ever expect to see the owner. You just don't.

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ML: How important is that to you that you are in your restaurant and you're out greeting customers and you know customers that have been coming here for years? Is that something is one of the more important aspects of doing barbecue for you?

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RW: It—it's—it is the most important thing, as far as I'm concerned. Especially dealing with local people and dealing with them day in and day out. We actually have customers that come in here five days a week, eat lunch—and eat lunch every day with us. And—and I think a big part of it is because they know that they're going to get something good to eat at a reasonable price, good service, and if there is a problem, there's somebody here that can fix it.

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RW: I'll give you a case in point. I went in to a chain hamburger place—I'm not going to actually mention the name of it, but in--in Natchez, Mississippi. Walked up to the counter, asked for a number one, the lady tried to put it on the computer. Then she tried to put it on the computer again, and then she said, "Sir I'm sorry, we can't fix you a hamburger, the computer's broke down." That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life, but that's the way things are operating. And—and we just don't do things that way. We—we still—we—we still fix you something whether our computer is broke down or not because we'll figure out a way to get it done.

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ML: What do you think sets you guys apart from other barbecue restaurants in the area, or even in Mississippi? Do you think it's that family element or the fact that you're actually in the restaurant, the way you guys do things? What makes you guys different?

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RW: Well, you know, I'm—I'm not real sure that we are a lot different than other Mom and Pop barbecue places. I—I do know that—that when you come in the door, you're just about all the time going to see a family member here, running the operation. And what we try to do and—and I'm not sure that you can get at all of the barbecue places is try to be consistent. You don't have to—you don't have to be good. You have to be consistent in this business. Don't give a man a good meal today and a bad one tomorrow. Make it the same every day.

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I always tell people, case in point, people that leave Los Angeles, California, going to drive to Atlanta, Georgia—when they leave, they get up and get ready to leave Los

Angeles, they go by McDonalds. When they get to Phoenix, they stop in at a McDonalds. When they get to Dallas, they stop in at McDonalds. When they get to Jackson, they stop in at McDonalds. And when they get to Atlanta, they stop at McDonalds. And it’s not because it’s good. It’s because it’s consistent. They know what they’re going to get when they walk in the door.

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ML: Switching gears a little bit to talk about barbecue, what style of barbecue was your uncle most known for?

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RW: Vicksburg, Mississippi is—or Mississippi is—is kind of a little bit in between the Georgia, South Carolina, vinegar barbecue and the Texas, real thick, beef brisket barbecue. So, we actually do it all. Up on the East Coast, you—you can’t hardly find a beef brisket. In Texas, you can’t find a pork shoulder. They just don’t do it. They do beef in Texas. They do pork up on the East Coast. And we do a little bit of all of it. We do beef, pork, ribs, chicken, and sausage. So, you can actually get the same—get, you know—get both of them here. And neither one of them are exactly like what you get in the Carolinas or what you get in Teas. In Carolina, it’s pulled pork. In Texas, it’s thick-sliced beef brisket. And—and the way we do it is we take the pork and the beef, and we actually slice all of it thin to assure tenderness. And—and cook it from—from that state. So it’s a little different than most everybody.

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ML: I was hoping you could tell me more about the way you guys slice your barbecue and why you do it that way and what you think—what difference it makes in the actual meat?

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RW: Basically, the—the idea behind our barbecue, which is a little bit different than most, is after we cook it, we chill it down. Then we put it on the meat slicer and slice it thin. And like I said, the thin slicing just basically assures the tenderness of the meat and that's when ours is really set apart from everybody else's. We take a big flat top grill that's 5 feet long, heat it up. We take the meat and we put it on that grill top, put the sauce on, and sear the sauce into the meat, and that searing of the sauce into the meat actually gives it a totally different flavor than just the smoke flavor from the pit and the barbecue sauce that most people give you separately that you pour over the meat. It is a totally different taste. And that's kind of what sets us apart.

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ML: How would you describe that taste?

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RW: Finger-licking good.

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ML: You were mentioning the pit, and I was hoping you could describe a little bit of what wood you guys use, how you smoke in the pit, that sort of thing.

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RW: Well, prior to 1993, a local guy had—had built several pits for Goldie and myself, and—and what happened over a period of years, we—we moved out of the little white

building into the—into the new building in 1983. And we doubled our business. Then when we moved again, we doubled it again and the little small pits that we were using from 1960 to 1983—I mean, it was just a royal pain. It was tough. It was outside cooking. It was taking the wood and stoking the pit constantly. It was constantly opening the doors and turning the meat, and—and I found a barbecue pit in 1993 that I bought from Southern Pride. The racks rotate. We get so much more of a consistent product with this Southern Pride barbecue pit. And they don’t give them away, but they—they really—over a period of years, save you on the—the waste, the loss in your product. So, we use a Southern Pride barbecue pit that we can put—oh, about four hundred pound of butts, or four hundred pounds of briskets, or three hundred pounds of ribs on at one time and cook. Because we’re cooking about a ton of meat a week.

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ML: What kind of wood do you guys use?

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RW: Strictly hickory. I’ve got a local guy that keeps me stocked. He goes to the woods during the spring and the fall and fills up his barn full of hickory. And I call and he brings me what I need.

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ML: What difference do you think using hickory wood makes, as opposed to something like pecan or anything like that?

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RW: Well, hickory, of course, has its own flavor, and it’s really good. And that’s what Goldie’s has always done in the fifty years that we’ve been doing it. But I-I’ll be honest

with you: mesquite is good. Dried pecan—you can’t use pecan when it’s—when it’s green because its going to give your meat a bitter flavor. I’ve even actually cooked some personal things with cherry, and it’s really good. So, there’s a lot of good wood out there that give your meat a good flavor, but hickory is what we started with and—and I mentioned earlier, you know, consistency in this business is the name of the game. So, if it’s not broke, don’t fix it.

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ML: Since consistency is so important to this business, I was hoping you could kind of elaborate on your menu. Have items stayed the same? Have items changed over time with customers kind of—do they want anything new, or do they like what you guys have consistently?

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RW: It’s interesting that you brought that subject up. I don’t feel like that we do enough here to satisfy the heart healthy people, the female clientele with light sides and salads and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Most people around here will tell you, “If you’re hungry, go to Goldie’s.” Because you’re not going to leave hungry. But if you’re on a diet or if you’re worried about your heart, it’s not the place to eat. But over the years, we have added a few things to the menu. When I first got in the business in 1980, Goldie had two side dishes. You could get French fries and a green salad. No matter what kind of plate you got: hamburger, steak, country fried steak, beef plate, pork plate, rib plate, you got French fries and a green salad, and you didn’t have no choice.

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Well, we've added barbecue beans and potato salad, coleslaw, corn on the cob. So we've added a few side dishes, but basically the meat situation has stayed the same. I—you know, I—we've added a Caesar salad, we've added a—one item that I really like that really caught on big time is a barbecue chef's salad. Take—make a regular chef's salad and take the hot beef or pork and put it on top and—and people really, really started eating that good. So, you know, we—we—we're changing a little bit, but basically Goldie's is known for being not worried about being heart healthy.

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ML: Do you have any desserts on the menu?

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RW: That's an item that I feel like we probably could—could really do a lot of expanding on. But believe it or not, most people that come here, when they get through eating what we put out, don't have room for dessert. We do have a cookies and cream pie, a lemon pie, a pecan pie, and—and that's basically it when it comes to dessert. And like I said, most people—it's not because our desserts are not good, but people are usually full when they get through with the plate and can't order dessert.

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ML: What seems to be the customer favorite that you guys have on your menu right now?

19:05:

RW: Well, when we moved into this building three years ago, we introduced a dry rib. We—we've always done a wet rib, and we introduced a dry rib three years ago. And believe it or not, that's outselling the wet ribs five to one. For some reason or another, the

people like that—that dry rub that we’ve got. It’s almost got a little Cajun seasoning to it, a little flavor to it that—that we put on the rib, the dry rub. And—and right now, that’s the hottest thing on the menu, but basically, beef, pork, and ribs pound-wise, I cook just about the size on all three every week. Chicken and pork—chicken and sausage, not quite as much.

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ML: About how many pounds of meat do you guys cook per week?

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RW: Right now we’re going through just about 2,000 pounds a week. About a ton.

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ML: That’s impressive. Where do you get most of your meat? Is it local, from Vicksburg, or kind of all around the state of Mississippi?

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RW: Actually, we don’t have a meat supplier in Vicksburg. We have had bought from different companies over the years, Hormel, Swift, different ones. And believe it or not, all of the old meat companies that we have dealt with over the years, they don’t deliver anymore. They’ve taken their services to food vendors like Sysco and US Foods and PFG and what they do is they—they sell to them, and then Sysco turns around and sells to me. And my number one meat supplier right now is Sysco out of Jackson.

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ML: When you guys first opened, was it just barbecue, or were you doing more of a wide variety on your menu?

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RW: Actually, when—when Goldie's was first opened in 1960, of course the main thing was the barbecue, but believe it or not, we sell cheeseburgers and hamburgers and—and Goldie's has always done that, always been known for their cheeseburgers. We—we— Goldie used to have a steak on the menu years ago, but we haven't cooked steak probably since 1982, 83. So, yea, basically barbecue.

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ML: Now when you first came into the restaurant, did you know what you were getting into? Did you know about barbecue culture, and how important it was to some people, or was it just something that you decided to try out? Did you have a real passion for cooking at first or did you kind of acquire that over the years?

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RW: Definitely didn't have a clue as to what was going on in the restaurant business, but I—I—I was real, real fortunate. I had a good mentor that stayed right there with me for two years until he passed away, gave me a lot of good advice over the years. I did find out that if there's anybody out there that would like to be in the restaurant business, and—and it doesn't really matter what kind you get into it—always remember this: business never fails, management does. That's why I—I get tickled, I tell people all the time that when you're in business for yourself, you can take off anytime you want to and you always got a pocket full of money. And if you don't believe that, you go talk to all of these people that are not in business for themselves. This thing right here, in order to be successful, you have to get up and pound the concrete day in and day out, day in and day out. And you have to learn to love it. If you don't love it, you're just not going to make it in this business.

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ML: Earlier too, you mentioned that other family members have worked here with you. You said that there's always a family member here when people come in. Who else works here in your family, aside from you?

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RW: Well, first of all, let me say that when I got in to this business my wife and I, Rhonda, worked side by side every day for 22 years. And that's tough to do because when you live with a woman and she can—she can watch you and your faults and your failures day in and day out, that's got to be a woman that loves you an awful lot to stay with you for 22 years that way. Now she doesn't participant in the business as much anymore as what she used to, but she—she's still has a hand in my catering. We have a banquet room that she takes care of all the banquets for the—for the restaurant. My son, Randy Junior, actually started working for me fifteen years ago, and eventually this thing's going to be his. Hopefully it won't be too many more years before that happens. And also, my daughter plays a big part in this business. She actually started working in the business when she was 14, 15 years old, got her Master's degree in accounting from Mississippi State, and—and she now takes care of my books for me. She's an accountant, got her Master's degree in accounting, and takes care of my books for me. So, my daughter takes care of my books, my wife takes care of my catering, and my son—I'm not really sure what he takes care of right now, but he'll finally figure it out.

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ML: Is it important—you mentioned one day, Goldie's will be his—is it important for you to keep it in the family? Keep the restaurant in the family?

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RW: Most definitely. There's one thing that will never happen. Goldie's will never be sold. At some point in time, the lot, the building, the equipment may be sold when I'm not here anymore. But there's going to be a clause in my will, or in the—the—when the reigns change hands to Randy Junior that Goldie's will never be sold, that if at some point in time something happens he has to get out of the business or wants to get out of the business, that Goldie's will never be sold. Just—just the lot, the building, the equipment.

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ML: Now you mentioned your wife takes care of most of the catering, and I was hoping you could tell me a little about the catering business and who you guys cater to and what seems to be in demand in this area.

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RW: Well, believe it or not, when we moved into this building three years ago, we—we built a little small banquet facility that will seat about a hundred people. And we—we've been—we've been—we actually ran the Vicksburg Convention Center for five years. We cater to as many as 1500 people—filet mignon—so we've got a pretty good handle on being able to feed a hundred people. And she takes care of all of the fancy dan banquets. And our banquet facility is not just limited to what we have on our menu. We do prime rib, we do steaks, we do catfish, we do anything that you want in our banquet room. Plus, we do most all of the big company picnics. We do a lot of fancy house parties. Goldie's is—and Goldie's Express, my little brother's place—we get together, we feed—we've fed as many as 2500 people at the time at different functions, and most of the time, our

barbecue catering—you know, we do everything we do barbecue-wise but we also do catfish, which is a big seller, fried catfish, steaks.

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ML: You mentioned Goldie's Express, and I was hoping you could elaborate a little bit on the difference between this Goldie's that we're in right now and Goldie's Express, which I know is take-out only—if you could tell me a little bit about that.

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RW: Right. In 1982, my brother-in-law started working for me at the old Goldie's while he was in college at Mississippi State. Well, he finally got out, started working for me full-time in 1983. And he—he got married, started having kids, and had four, by the way, which is unbelievable for this day and time. But what I could afford to pay him, you know, he had to have more money. So what he came up with was the idea of a double drive-through over on Pemberton Boulevard by the mall, and we opened up a double drive-through over there, called it Goldie's Express, and he has done wonders with it, opened up in 1991. So, he's actually been in business 19 years with the Express. And he does a few things a little different than what we do here. The barbecue is pretty much the same. We make the sauce here, and he takes it over there, but he's got a pit just like mine, does his beef, pork, ribs, all of that pretty much the same. But he does red beans and rice, et cetera, you know, a few other items that we don't do here, but we do a few here that he don't do over there. And—and it's really designed that way because his is a double drive-through and—and he has to be extremely quick with what he does.

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ML: What's his name?

0:29:40**RW:** Gary Thomas.**0:29:43**

ML: Now being as close as Vicksburg to Louisiana, how do you think that's affected the type of food that you guys cook, if it's even affected it all? I know you were just saying he does red beans and rice, which is different for a barbecue place. Do you think that's affected the way he's done barbecue or the way you guys have done it or what you have on your menu or anything like that?

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RW: Well, sure, it has a little bit of an effect. The—the—being this close to Louisiana, we—we do some things here that—or actually at the Express, Gary sells crawfish every year through his drive-through. He sells a boiled shrimp on the weekends. And all of it's Cajun boiled because—because we're so close to Louisiana. But—but if you think about it, rather than—than a Louisiana effect here in Vicksburg, there's no large communities just right across the river from Vicksburg. You have to go all the way to Monroe to find a big town, so basically, we—we do—both of us have good clientele from right across the bridge, but it's not a lot of it because there's—there's not any large communities close to Vicksburg right across the river in Louisiana.

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ML: Now being right across the river and being right off the interstate—I know earlier you mentioned you have a lot of people that are local, and they come in and they're here five days a week for lunch. But do you have a lot of tourists come by and kind of—they

see you guys off the interstate, like you were talking about your location is so good being on the access road—how do you think that's affected your clientele?

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RW: Well, we're actually building on that now. Many, many, many, many, many years ago, before the interstate was built from 1960 to 1970, Highway 80, which was only route from Atlanta to Dallas went right in front of the old Goldie's. Then they opened the interstate in 1970—well, over the years, we built a clientele of interstate traffic at the old Goldie's simply because people would stop, get gas, and they'd say, "Let's—let's grab us a burger, grab us a sandwich," and then they always remembered it. Whether they were going from Arkansas to Florida for vacation or Dallas to Atlanta on business—well, they'd stop off maybe for gas or for whatever, they found us and then once they found us, I've always believed if I could get them in once, that they would be back. And over the years, it worked out that way. We—we've got a good highway clientele. Believe it or not, I've still got a few clients that after three years are just now finding us, and all of them say, "Oh, I'm so glad that you're still open and we found you because you moved away from where you were." So it—it's—being on the interstate now, it's going to take several years to build a big highway clientele, but it's coming. The longer you can stay, the better it'll get.

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ML: Now I noticed on the wall over there, you have a little article from *Southern Living*, and you also are on the Top 100 Barbecue Places in America, I believe, I saw on a plaque over there. I was hoping you could tell us a little bit about that.

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RW: Well, the *Southern Living* magazine article—there’s kind of a funny story about it. We were still in the old, old building. This was a long time ago. *Southern Living* did an article and had us in *Southern Living*, and I had no idea as to what magazine could do for your business. It hit the local newsstand on a Wednesday, and on Thursday night, I had to drive to Shreveport [Louisiana] to pick up meat to cook because we were sold out of everything we had. It was just unbelievable for about two-week period. And—and we actually still get people, 30 years ago, that say, “I remember when y’all were in the *Southern Living* magazine, and we just had to stop by and eat.” So, we’ve gotten some accolades over the years. Vince Staten wrote a book, *Real Barbecue*, that—that—that we were in his book.

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We’ve had numerous newspaper articles all over the country. I don’t really take all of that stuff and put it out on the wall. I probably should, but one thing that I tell people all the time about is there’s a barbecue place in Manhattan, New York called Virgil’s that opened up up there probably 10, 12 years ago that they have a placemat on their table that they use every day with the top ten barbecue places in the country on that mat, and we’re one of them. And I did not know that they had even been here. And they came by and ate, and when they went back and printed up their placemat, they said, “This is one of the best places that we ever went to.” We were happy with that, and—and also too, we were on a TV show. It’s been one of—on the cooking channel probably—probably 10, 12 years ago they did a—a barbecue thing across the South that—that had numerous barbecue places from the South Carolina to Texas, and we were actually on TV there on one of the cooking shows.

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ML: It sounds like you guys primarily rely on word of mouth to build your clientele. Like you were saying when the *Southern Living* people came in the next day—do you have people that come in and go home and tell your friends? Because that’s how we heard about you from word of mouth, so is that primarily what you guys rely on to advertise or do you advertise in the newspapers around Vicksburg or is it just word of mouth?

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RW: No doubt, word of mouth is—is--free advertising is the best advertising that you can possibly have. It also can be the worst if somebody gets a bad taste in their mouth. And I’ve always said that you can get all of the “Atta-boys” in the world but one “Aw shit” is going to mess up all of them. So, you try not to get any bad publicity. Don’t do a lot of advertising in the local newspapers or radio stations. Do a little bit from time to time. We’re going to do a bunch this year because we’re going to actually have a 50-year celebration a little bit more toward the end of the year. We’re going to rev that up big time, but—but normally we don’t, you know—after—after 50 years, you kind of really just need to concentrate on consistency and doing things the right way and trying to keep up with the rest of the world.

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ML: What do you guys have planned for your 50-year anniversary?

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RW: Well, we've got some—full-page ad coming out in the newspaper. We're talking about doing bottle of Cokes for a nickel like it was in 1960, got a few different ideas. Just really hadn't put it all together yet.

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ML: Have you ever competed in any sort of barbecue competition or are you primarily just here at Goldie's, staying here as the owner?

0:38:04

RW: Well, I—I—I have kind of a funny deal about the barbecue cook-offs. I've been asked to judge some in different places, and I've done that over the years and I enjoy doing that. But it—it's kind of like this: if the local church has a barbecue cook-off, and Goldie's goes to it and there's 10 people there cooking, and John Doe down the street on the corner wins, that doesn't do anything for me at all. So, I just don't—I don't get involved in the cook-offs. I've been invited to different ones over the years—could have been in Memphis in May, could have been in la-da-da-da-da, but again, I decided that it's best for me to be in my business and take care of my business than out trying—trying to out-cook some people.

0:39:06

ML: Barbecue competitions are really interesting to me because you have people that say the meat is important, and then you have people that say the sauce is more important. Do you have any thoughts on that? What do you think is more important, or do you think they're equally as important? I know because you guys slice your meat a little differently – what do you think matters more in barbecue?

0:39:26

RW: Well, of course. My philosophy about the barbecue basically is start with a good product. Don't—don't go buy a four and a half and down and sour rib and try to feed it to somebody. Always start with a quality product. A St.Louis style rib. You know, start with a quality product. But after that, I more tend to believe that if a restaurant brings you the meat and the sauce in a cup, they're just not real confident in what they're doing. So, I feel like the combination of the meat and the sauce is what's important. I don't like to serve my meat without the barbecue sauce, but we do. We do all the time, but I prefer the searing of the sauce into the meat on the flattop grill actually gives it the Goldie's flavor. So, I—I think it's a combination of the two.

0:40:38

ML: The Goldie's flavor that you're talking about, is that something that's been with the restaurant since it started or have you guys tweaked it over the years or has it--? I know you're a fan of consistency, so has it stayed that way?

0:40:48

RW: Goldie came up with the recipe in his early years at the Mountain View Inn in Arkansas, and we have not changed anything. The recipe for the barbecue sauce is exactly the same. We're making about 200 gallons a week, and we still make it, still do it the same way he did. We cook the meat, chill the meat, slice the meat pretty much the same way that it's been done since back in the early 50's.

0:41:24

ML: Switching gears to talk about Mississippi barbecue really fast, what do you think the future holds for Mississippi barbecue?

0:41:31

RW: I’ve got some catering I’ve got to do.

0:41:33

ML: That’s right. Well, we can—if you can just answer that question, I’ll only ask you one more.

0:41:36

RW: Okay. Now say that again.

0:41:38

ML: What do you think the—the state of Mississippi and barbecue in Mississippi, what do you think the future holds for it? Do you think it’s going to change or stay the same or evolve over time?

0:41:49

RW: Well, of course whenever you—whenever people talk about barbecue, you don’t hear a whole lot about Mississippi. You hear about Texas barbecue, and you hear about Memphis barbecue. They’ve got 300 barbecue restaurants in Memphis, Tennessee. The ultimate for me is for a person from Texas or a person from Memphis to come to—to my restaurant, sit down, and eat and say, “You know, this is almost as good as what we do at home.” You’re not ever going to be the best. Everybody’s *[coughs]* favorite barbecue is the barbecue that they grew up on. Always. What we try to do is we try to do be the second best that they’ve ever had. And Mississippi, we’ve got a lot of good barbecue in Mississippi and a lot of different places. Ours are more country store barbecue, and I’m going to tell you when you get an opportunity to stop in an old country store and they’ve got barbecue there for you to eat, try it because it’s going to be good. I guarantee it’s going to be good.

0:43:15

ML: What's your favorite thing about being in the barbecue business, as a final thought?

0:43:22

RW: Oh, probably I would say the long hours, the low pay—no, I've enjoyed being my own boss for the last thirty years. Well, let me rephrase that. I've enjoyed my own boss for the last eight because my wife was for the first 22. But—building a clientele, being able to call as many as I can by their first name when they walk in the door, and by the way, if you can call people by their first name, when they walk in the door, you've got them. They'll be back. I'm almost 59 years old so I'm losing a little bit of my memory but the key to it and the thing that I like about it is when I'm out in the community, believe it or not, I actually have a lot of community respect from people. They always say hello, and that's just the kind of person that I am. I know you, no matter where you are or what you're doing or how you do it. We've fed governors, we've fed professional football players, we've fed lawyers, we've fed doctors. We've had doctors and lawyers sitting down next to painters and the guy that comes from waste management and gets the garbage. We all just get along, and that's why I like about the business. The wide variety of different people that you—that you meet and that you make friends with.

0:45:07

ML: Do you have any final thoughts before we end our interview?

0:45:13

RW: Actually, no. I think we pretty much covered most everything.

0:45:21

ML: I think we did too.

0:45:23

RW: I will say that you have been delightful and probably the best interviewer that I have ever had.

0:45:29

ML: *[Laughs]* Well, thank you.

0:45:30

RW: These people sometimes are just idiots, and you just didn’t miss a beat.

0:45:36

ML: Well, thank you. That’s very flattering. You’ve been my first interview on the Southern Barbecue Trail, so I’m going—

0:45:42

RW: I’m your first? Oh my goodness!

0:45:44

ML: You’re my very first.

0:45:48

RW: Well, I knew I was number one somehow!

[End Randy Wright Interview]