



jon jon's bbq

Written by Doug Geyer • Photography by Catie Viox

When life gives you lemons, make Mango Tango sauce. Lemonade might be fine for some, but John and Shannon Cleghorn have been inspired to be a bit more inventive with their “lemons.” If necessity is the mother of invention, the necessities of their life have also called for divine intervention. And the growing fan base of Jon Jon’s BBQ and Catering is all too happy to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Owning and operating a food truck was not originally a part of the couple’s plan. But when John was diagnosed with cancer for the second time, they were desperately searching for a new way forward for both their financial and emotional health.

After successfully battling testicular cancer more than a decade ago, it was disheartening to be faced with a new round of the serious illness. When they decided it would be best to step away from serving in ministry full-time, Shannon found a new calling in teaching, but John’s physical challenges limited his career options. It got to the point where they were close to losing their home.

So they prayed.

“It started with us trying to save our home and my sanity,” John says. “Not working was driving me crazy, so we prayed for God to lead us where we needed to go. Out of the blue, an old friend called and asked if we wanted to buy his food truck.”

Although John and Shannon never envisioned a food truck as the answer to their prayers, they stepped forward in faith and are now building a thriving business and a special team as well.

In addition to their two adopted children, Hope and JT, John and Shannon have “adopted” Dylan Alexander and Riley Pickrel as well. They aren’t just critical parts of the Jon Jon’s crew but members of the family.



“They are like our kids. We make it a point to eat together when we’re working and they’re at the house even when we don’t have events. We are big on building family,” John says.

Shannon adds, “It’s been great for us to make memories with Hope and JT as well. Just being together as we travel to festivals, carnivals, antique shows, Cedar Point. Sharing our story and hearing other people’s stories.”

Family is not only the backbone of their business, but the foundation of John’s gift for creating recipes that make Jon Jon’s barbecue unique compared with typical fare. He remembers fondly how his grandmother was the first to pull him into the kitchen to teach him about cooking. His parents also played a part in training a palate that

has high standards for capturing the perfect balance of flavor.

John honors his mom with Nana’s Potato Salad and his late grandma with Grandma E’s Slaw and Smoked Beans. Customers also rave about Dinosaur Bone (full plate beef rib), Cupcake Chicken (boneless thighs smoked in cupcake tins) and Monster Taters (huge smoked potato with choice of meat).

John loves experimenting with artistic and atypical combinations using different fruits as the canvas and bold spices to add color. With fruit-based sauces like Cherry Bomb (cherry chipotle), Mango Tango (mango, peach and habanero) and Blue Velvet (blueberry), which pairs best with beef, John takes his time when designing a new sauce or dish, enjoying the means as well as the result.

“I really love getting it right. Seeing people’s eyes roll back in their heads. It’s all about the flavor.”

The powerful dynamic of this duo continues to serve them well as it did when they were serving in the ministry. Shannon runs the truck with her effervescent personality while John’s creative juices keep everything marinating in new, innovative ideas.

But spreading their faith is still more important than serving food. With all they’ve been through, Shannon and John celebrated when Hope concluded recently, “God has gotten us this far. Everything is going to be OK.” ❖

1. Jon Jon's crew (left to right) – Riley, JT, John, Hope, Shannon and Dylan

Jon Jon's BBQ caters events of all kinds from business lunches to weddings. You can find them on Facebook, @jonjonsbbqcatering, or call them at 513.615.6899.