

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Philip's Cook-Off

Cold Saturday. 40 degrees plus may seem like a spring day in Maine. Florida people put on fleece and parkas, knitted caps and long pants. Even see some with gloves. One of those Saturdays, surprisingly enough in March, when previous week was laced with 80 degrees plus, we'd decided this was the anointed day to trek on up to Sarasota and visit Selby Gardens to see some of the flowers and shrubs AJ wanted to plant about the house. Her goal being to get rid of this green stuff euphemistically labeled grass here in Florida. From Selby we'd go to another commercial operation which sold native and Florida friendly plants which thrive on nano water, mega heat and minimal personal care. My kind of landscaping enthusiastically.

Both visits were well worth the time. Selby Gardens (home and grounds) left to Sarasota by Marie Selby, encompasses a well exhibited and large collection of not only Florida plants but subtropicals and tropicals from various parts of the world. Plants there one couldn't imagine existed. Wildly beautiful to the grotesque. We took a lot of pictures, tried to stay warm in shorts and short sleeves (while the sun was out) and bought a few plants from vendors who happened to be displaying.

From there we headed due east into flat farm country populated by grazing cattle and intermittent, totally out of place, regurgitated subdivisions. Neat to leave the city bustle of Sarasota and in minutes discover pastoral quiet and old Florida.

Half way out to the Florida friendly we happened to spot a couple of hand lettered signs flying balloons saying 'Philip's Cook-off' with arrows pointing the way. Short distance we came up on a dirt road leading into a large spread and a guy pounding in what was the last sign with more balloons. Had to stop. Curiosity running up the scale. Backed up, rolled the window down and AJ asked, "What's Philip's Cook-off?" Michael Herschberger, whom we later met and got to talk with, said this was a BBQ cook-off to benefit his 7-year-old nephew Philip, who had Cystic Fibrosis, and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Admission was free with a \$25 donation for family and friends and whoever dropped by. All you could eat and drink, band, games and rides for kids etc.

"Come on in," he said, "and join the fun."

Enjoying new experiences as we do (and food), we allowed we'd love to join them and would return after the final garden visit which also turned out to be quite a pleasant experience and well worth the trip. AJ found the plants she was looking for. We met some very knowledgeable ladies and also met the resident cracker steer named apropos "Crackers". "Crackers" being a descendent of the original Spanish cattle with huge horns

and a voice designed to put the recipient on notice. The scrub grazing ground some of these cattle live in would make a Maine subsistence farm shine. With all the cactus, palms, scrub pine and other unclassifieds it's hard to imagine cattle can find enough to exist on let alone add weight.

By 5:30 we were back at the cook-off. We later found out the ranch had been a tree farm and the new owner, Philip's grandfather, had regraded, dug a couple of farm ponds, and seeded in grass. He'd fenced entire property with white corral fence, put in a beautiful white shell driveway and built a large steel barn. With the addition of some 65 head of cattle which were mostly brood stock, it was now quite a beautiful working ranch. Attesting to some hard work in the process.

Greeting at the donation desk by Philip's mother was warm and welcoming. This friendly feeling was to remain throughout the time we stayed. Soon obvious though, we weren't dressed for the occasion. Temperature was dropping and even with a vest for AJ and a thin nylon jacket for myself, it would be chilly. Second, this was ranch territory. Virtually everyone was sporting jeans and cowboy boots. Boat shoes were nowhere in sight. Except for mine. Felt like we stood out just a bit. Not to worry. Folks were there to sample fine barbecue and fixins and have some fun.

AJ and I wandered around, talked with some of the people there and then with a few of the guys on the smokers doing the variety of chicken, beef, pulled pork and BBQ pork. Obvious immediately this was serious business for both the cooks and recipients of this fine food. This was a cook-off. Winners would be named by a panel of judges and most important judged by family and friends. Though we never did hear of a special prize to the winner I'm sure the bragging rights were a definite consideration. BBQ is serious business in the south. Subject of endless discussion of dry rubs, particular spices, marinade times, bastings etc. Lobster feeds are a whole lot easier. Put the lobster and clams in water or under canvassed seaweed and when they're done they're done.

Set up in the barn was a table with pills, oxygen breather, pictures, and various other information on what it took to get young Philip through the day and keep him alive. CF was something neither AJ nor I know much about and I think we came away quite humbled and thankful for the health of our own families. What young Philip has to endure pretty well staggers the imagination. Hats off to those parents who are caretakers of such a challenging situation.

We all were introduced to Philip when he stood up on an overturned crate to draw three judge's names from the crowd who would sit down with the professional judges. His Dad, the announcer said he'd been rehearsing a thank you speech that week but when it came time for Philip to take the microphone he'd decided that it would be more fun to go back to playing with his friends than speak to this crowd of people. Everyone understood. Gave him a big round of applause which warmly encompassed his family as well.

We had a few pops, beer or wine, while the volunteers began to ready the long table with bowls of potato salad, cole slaw, fruit, cornbread, cold vegetable appetizers, baked beans, black-eyed peas, greens and desserts. Major food spread here. Then on signal, the BBQ chefs started coming through the doors carrying

stainless trays laden with meat. Line didn't take long to form up on both sides of the table. Folks started strategically filling the large plates as good natured remarks flowed. Directions to spouses and family with observations, "that's so and so's beef", "try this one" filled the air as we piled on evermore. Finally, with no room left on the plates, we juggled our way to a handy beam on the side of the building, set everything down, pulled up a chair and dug in. Unbelievable and outstanding wrapped up in one.

We ate, discussed the nuances of the soft lemony taste of Michael's chicken, dry rub of so and so's pork, moist of another's beef (as much as we could recall their names) until our plates were just about clean. Stuffed was just shy of description. No way could we join some of the folks going back for seconds. We hurt. But was it wicked good and quite an experience to join these folks for such a great cause.

We'd have certainly enjoyed staying for the later festivities but temperature had dropped and we were both shivering. So, with thanks to the family we headed for the van, started the engine and wound the heat up as high as it would go. Even before driving I had to get warm. Cold in Florida seems to go straight to the bones. Swear I've been as cold here at 40 degrees as on the ski slopes at home.

We're hoping for an invitation to return next year. Perhaps we can add a few Maine blueberry pies to the spread.

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For these 'warming up' days of spring and to get the juices up for summer barbecuing, try these country ribs. I worked up the recipe from a "Special" at the meat counter and though not as wicked as the cook-off, I think they'll hold their own quite well.

Hoisin Ponzu Country Ribs

2 oz. Hoisin sauce	1 lb. or rack country style ribs
1/3 cup Kikkoman Ponzu sauce	(separated by twos)
1 clove garlic, minced	2 medium pepperoncini
5 stalks tender celery about 6" long	2 qt. covered pot for braising
1/4 sweet onion very coarse, chopped	Rub w/salt and pepper

Spread the celery in the bottom of the pot along with the chopped onion. Place one pepperoncini at each end of pot. Mix together the Hoisin sauce, minced garlic, and Ponzu sauce. Cut the rack in two pieces, place on celery and onions and pour sauce over. Cover and bake in oven at 425 degrees for about an hour. Reduce heat to 375 degrees for another hour. Meat should be quite soft when done. Serve with sauce and braised vegetables. Half of the ribs are white and half are darker. After cooking split so each plate has 1/2 of each. I sort of separated the meat to work the sauce in. Elegant.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur