

he's got the meats

Officer Richard Ramirez shares his experience with smoking and grilling meats

by **sydney collinger**

photo editor

According to the Ramirez family's tradition, a feast begins around 3 p.m. But for that to even occur, with a prime rib weighing in at 20 pounds to feed approximately 20 family members, those preparing said feast face a daunting time frame. But there is never any hesitation from either of the cooks in the kitchen.

"If it's a 12-hour cook and everybody wants to eat at 3 p.m., then you start at 3 a.m.," Ladue school's resource officer Richard Ramirez said.

Richard and Rey Ramirez, one of his younger brothers and co-cook, begin each of their Christmas days around 3 a.m. in Monterey, Calif.

because "a lot of prepping goes into cooking good things," according to Richard. Surrounded by a large family, a plethora of food proved necessary. However, it was not only a necessity, but a way to bring those gathered closer. Therefore, at the center of Christmas day, and an abundance of other gatherings with the Ramirez family, rests a smoker or a grill.

"I won't smoke something just for myself because it's such a long process," Richard said. "When I smoke things, it's for gatherings, neighbors, friends, family, all bigger gatherings."

There are many steps that go into getting a cut of meat ready for a smoker or a grill. In the case of a prime rib, a day or two provides enough time for brine to soak in.

This introduces the initial flavor to the cut. Then, the cook introduces smoke. A smoker's temperature rests around 245 F (which is low in cooking terms) for a prime rib of this size. As the smoke billows in like convection currents, fats in the cut start to break down in the muscle and distribute into the meat which in turn makes the meat more tender. It's a unique process and an even more unique connector.

"[My] dad was always grilling something on the weekends," Richard said. "[And] my mom usually put something on during the week."

Richard would admire the work and effort put into grilling and smoking meats as far back as he can remember and would even want to be involved in the smallest ways.

like all kids, you wanted to start the charcoal because there was fire and that was interesting for kids," Richard said. "So as long as I can remember, grilling was something fun."

As Richard has grown, he's constantly learning to perfect the art of smoking and grilling, a common goal of cooks of his caliber.

"[Smoking meat is] always [about] learning because you don't know what tastes [good together]," Richard said. "[For example], it took me a long time to come up with my barbecue rub because you know [that] salt, pepper, garlic, onion powder and things like that [go together and] are always gonna go well together. But how is this spice gonna react to this spice? [You're] trying to figure it out. You're al-

ways learning."


To aid the learning process, those who smoke and grill at Ladue find themselves briefly sharing techniques they've learned that make their cooking experiences more successful with each other and Richard, including activities coordinator Greg Kendall.

"It's been fun to learn things," Kendall said. "Sometimes when things don't come out exactly right, I'll tell Officer Ramirez what [my family and I] did and ask what we did wrong. He's always got good suggestions."

The process of both sharing recipes and coming together over food are vital to what the practice means to smokers and grillers. Sharing is not only sought after for its ability to bring people closer but helpful due to the large amount of meat that needs consuming.

"For the Super Bowl I made five racks of ribs; three of them were for my Super Bowl party and two [were] for my neighbor who also happened [to throw a Super Bowl party]," Richard said. "It's something to share."

The lengthy process proves worthy to smokers and grillers alike, because it's one that people don't go through unless they have many people to feed. Both Richard and Kendall agree on the reward that comes from smoking and grilling.

"I care more about [the time it takes to grill] than I do [about] how it actually tastes," Kendall said. "I've been amazed that we've created some dinners that felt like we're eating at a restaurant. But the more important thing to me is [that] the family has gotten together and we've had a good afternoon and we've gotten to talk about what's [going on]." 



THE PROCESS: Officer Richard Ramirez smokes a large batch of pork steaks March 10 in the Ladue high school parking lot. This process first consists of heating the smoker, then brining the steaks with his special rub and other ingredients, then routinely spritzing the steaks with apple juice before glazing them in butter and honey and putting them back in the smoker. He receives help from Rick Dent, a custodian at the high school, and Noah Ramirez, his son. "I love the process [of smoking meats]," Richard said. "But at the end of the day, it's a way to bring people together to have a meal and real contact." (Photos by Sydney Collinger)