



LEGACY INDUCTEE

GARY AND CAROLYN WELLS

Gary and Carolyn Wells began to carve their niche in the Kansas City barbecue community in the early 1980s. Having recently moved to the city in 1976, Gary and Carolyn gained competition experience in what would later become top-tier barbecue events – the Memphis in May, American Royal Barbecue and Great Lenexa BBQ Battle. In fact, the couple won the American Royal Barbecue in 1982, cooking ribs on a borrowed grill.

In the mid 1980s, barbecue contests were locally organized events and each competition had its own set of rules. Popularity for the sport, however, was growing rapidly. This was especially apparent to Carolyn, who was constantly receiving phone calls at her desk in Wicker's BBQ Products office in Hornersville, Missouri, from cooks and competitors asking where the next competition was. The timing was right, and in 1986, the Wells, along with Rick Welch, founded the Kansas City Barbeque Society.

First, the trio decided to publish a newsletter they named The Kansas City Bullsheet, which printed, "All the BBQ news fit to eat." About 30 people paid the \$12 Bullsheet membership fee when it was first introduced at the Great Lenexa BBQ Battle, and by the end of the year; there were more than 100 members. Without paid employees and very little structure, KCBS was off and running.

After neighboring communities began to approach Gary and Carolyn to help organize their contests, the pressure was on to develop uniform guidelines. Soon after, Gary and Carolyn appointed a Board of Directors, developed official contest rules, judging procedures and purchased a computer program that was capable of tabulating contest results. KCBS began to sanction contests regionally, and the rest is barbecue history.

Gary and Carolyn's original "club" is now more than 19,000 members strong, has certified more than 22,000 barbecue judges and sanctions more than 450 contests annually. Sadly, Gary Wells passed away in 2007, having just retired as President for Life. The same passion he and Carolyn shared for competition barbecue in the organization's early years is still imbedded in the KCBS culture today. In 1995, Carolyn was named KCBS Executive Director and continues to serve in that role. Under her direction, KCBS contributes to more than 400 charitable and civic organizations, including Kookers Care and Operation BBQ Relief.