



## Political Pork

*Dueling barbecue joints in North Georgia toe opposing party lines*

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By Jim Auchmutey

Ellijay, Ga. --- Marvin Griffin, one of Georgia's most quotable governors, uttered a memorable piece of political analysis when his bid for a second term failed in 1962. He had assumed that the race was going to be close because his campaign barbecues had drawn huge crowds. But, as he lamented, "Everybody that ate my barbecue I don't believe voted for me."

The people in this mountain town of 1,500 stand happily accused of similar treachery. They eat the opposition's barbecue all the time. Can't help it. Ellijay may have more political pork than any address this side of Washington.

In the Democratic column, there's the Pink Pig (not the Pinko Pig, as some conservative punsters call it), where Bud Holloway proudly displays photos of the Clintons and the Carters. He befriended Jimmy and Rosalynn when he helped build their nearby log cabin retreat, and he doesn't cotton to people bad-mouthing them. "After he left the White House," Holloway says, "people would come in and say ugly things about him, and I'd have to ask them to leave."

The Republican side can be found down the highway at Poole's Bar-B-Q and Pig Hill of Fame, a dug-out slope that looks like some folk-art vision of a graveyard, with hundreds of plywood pigs bearing people's names. Some of the pigs have names like Pat Buchanan and Rush Limbaugh.

"I've got one Democrat up there," admits Oscar Poole, who's also chairman of the local GOP. "Someone paid me to do one for Al Gore. I put him on the left side of the hill and tried to hide him."

Dole or Clinton? Chopped or sliced? In Ellijay, the simple act of eating out means facing the tough issues. "I've got to vote for Perot just to stay neutral," says Roger Elliott, who delivers meat to both restaurants.

Politics and barbecue have been entwined in Southern tradition since the days of a Virginia officeholder named Washington. Generations of pols have used smoke and pork to gather crowds and celebrate victories. The Talmadges served up some of their juiciest rhetoric at Georgia pig-pickin's. Newt Gingrich marked his election as speaker of the House by inviting Williamson Bros. Bar-B-Q of Marietta to cater a conservative pig-out in Washington.

"Newt Gingrich," Holloway says, savoring each syllable the way a fire-and-brimstone preacher lingers over the evil sound of Beelzebub. "I'd never cook a pig for that man."

Poole not only has cooked for that man, but he gave him his own plywood pig.

The dueling barbecue joints are predictably located on a road named for a politician, the Zell Miller Mountain Parkway. Holloway came first. He was a truck driver with family roots in the area when he decided in 1967 to buy a barbecue place in the community of Cherry Log, just north of Ellijay. Over the years, he's cooked for Miller, Herman Talmadge and a host of other Democrats, including, last month, a 500-plate fund-raiser for U.S. Senate nominee Max Cleland.

But no Democrat is closer to Holloway's populist heart than Carter. The restaurant displays dozens of snapshots of the Carters during their mountain sojourns in Gilmer County. They've returned the favor by inviting the Holloways to Plains, where they can see the bedroom furniture Jimmy made from quarter-sawed oak Bud milled for him.

"I remember the first time they came in here," says Holloway, 64, a big, slow-drawling man wearing a T-shirt, baseball cap and overalls, a cell phone peeking out of a pocket. "The Secret Service spent an hour checking out the place. I heard one of them say, 'Wait till he sees where he has to go to the bathroom.'" You have to walk outside to reach the men's room at the Pink Pig.

Poole's Bar-B-Q came along two decades after Holloway. Poole, a 66-year-old Methodist minister, retired to Ellijay and opened his restaurant in 1989. In a way, he has Big Government to thank for the flash of inspiration that has gained his business international publicity, the Pig Hill of Fame.

"It was LBJ's wife," he says. "She started all this."

He's referring to one of Lady Bird's pet causes, highway beautification, and the fact that the state prohibited his putting signs along the highway right of way. He countered with the plywood pigs --- almost 3,000 of them on his property ---the whole wacky wallow plainly visible from the parkway.

Poole, a paunchy man who literally snorts when he laughs, has been involved in Republican politics for several years and was an alternate delegate to the national convention in San Diego. He's hosting a rally for Guy Millner, Cleland's U.S. Senate opponent, starting with a parade he'll lead in his "pigmobile," a '77 Volare outfitted with ears and snout.

Poole's political hero, Pat Buchanan, has visited the restaurant twice during primary campaigns. When John Baeder, a Nashville artist who specializes in roadside Americana, stopped by to paint the Hill of Fame, Poole insisted that he feature Buchanan and other right-wingers prominently among the honored hogs.

"I told him I wanted to find the Pink Pig," Baeder recalls, "and he said, 'Why do you want to go there? That's liberal barbecue.'"

Actually, Poole and Holloway are friendly, if not friends, and have been known to eat the other's food. Poole goes to Holloway's for steak (although he doesn't like the barbecue), and Holloway has gotten takeout from Poole's (although he thinks the pork has too much fat).

The only time the two have clashed has been over signs. Holloway and the state have waged a long-running skirmish over his placing a pink plywood pig too close to the highway. For his part, Holloway maintains that Poole's hill of hogs violates local ordinances.

"I've talked to Oscar about it," says East Ellijay Mayor Mack West. "I tell him he can't nail signs on trees, and he just goes on talking like it went over his head. My Council gets on me about it. But Oscar's good for this town. He's like a one-man Chamber of Commerce."

Holloway's take on the situation? "Mack's a Republican," he says, as if that's all that needs to be said.