

The Rise & Smoke Story: Mike Johnson, The SmokeMaster

The Calling

Mike Johnson never intended to become Hillsboro's most talked-about pitmaster. Raised in a family where Sunday dinners were sacred and the kitchen was the heart of every gathering, Mike thought his path was set: work hard, retire, enjoy life. But sometimes, the Lord has different plans.

The Discovery

After retirement, Mike spent his weekends with faith, family and smoke! He'd spend hours in his backyard, not just cooking, but *studying* the smoke itself. He noticed how different woods created different particle sizes, how temperature affected the way smoke moved, how humidity changed everything.

The breakthrough came during a particularly challenging brisket that just wouldn't take the smoke right. Frustrated, Mike stepped back and really *watched* the smoke for the first time. That's when he saw it—the way perfect smoke didn't just drift, it *rose* in organized columns, carrying flavor compounds in predictable patterns.

"It hit me like a revelation," he says. "Smoke isn't random. When you get the conditions just right—the right wood, the right temperature, the right airflow—the smoke rises in these beautiful streams, and that's when the real transformation happens. Not just on the meat, but all the way through it."

The Method

What started as weekend curiosity became Mike's obsession. He began noticing everything: wood moisture content, different temperatures – different results, air pressure changes.

"Most pitmasters talk about 'feeling' when the smoke is right," Mike explains. "But I wanted to know *why* it was right. What was actually happening when smoke penetrated meat? How could I make it hit perfectly every single time?"

Working with his uncle, a retired welder & machinist, Mike modified his smokers to create precise airflow patterns. He studied how smoke particles behaved at different temperatures, how they bonded with proteins, how they transformed simple meat into something extraordinary.

Mike had finally cracked the code. He called it "The Rise & Transform Method™"—a precise process where smoke isn't just applied to meat, but guided to rise in controlled patterns that ensure deep, even penetration every single time.

Faith & Family

Tie Johnson still rolls her eyes when she tells the story of how Mike's "little hobby" took over their garage, then their backyard, then eventually their entire weekend schedule. But she also remembers the Sunday after church when friends and family fought to get the "first slice" of Mike's brisket because they were all convinced it was the prime slice.

Mike soon realized his obsession with perfect smoke wasn't just about technique—it was about serving others, about bringing people together, about honoring the gifts God had given him.

"When you take something ordinary and transform it into something extraordinary, that's a reflection of what God does in our lives," Mike says. "Every time I see that smoke rising just right, carrying those flavors deep into the meat, I'm reminded that transformation is possible. Always."

The Community Connection

Word spread quickly and friends started asking Mike to cater church events, then graduation parties, then weddings. Each time, people didn't just compliment the food—they talked about the *experience*. How the meat seemed to have flavor all the way through. How it was unlike any BBQ they'd ever tasted.

"I kept hearing the same thing," Mike remembers. "'This doesn't just taste like smoke on the outside. The smoke goes all the way to the bone.'"

That's when Mike knew he had something special. His method wasn't just creating great BBQ—it was creating something people had never experienced before.

Building Something Special

From day one, Mike was determined that Rise N' Smoke would be more than just another BBQ joint. He took his tagline seriously: —"Real Smoke. Real Deep. Real Good." Every menu item tells the story of transformation. Every meal reflects the care and precision of The Rise & Transform Method™.

"People ask me what makes our BBQ different," Mike says. "It's not just the science, though that matters. It's not just the technique, though we've perfected that. It's that we understand smoking is about transformation—taking something good and making it extraordinary. That's what we do here, one plate at a time."

The Science Meets the Soul

Today, Mike still start every morning the same way—checking his smokers, adjusting airflow, monitoring temperatures. But now he's not just cooking for his family or his Sunday school class. He's serving a community that has embraced his vision of what BBQ can be.

"Every morning when I fire up those smokers and watch that first smoke start to rise, I'm reminded why I do this," Mike reflects. "It's not about being the best pitmaster or having the most scientific method. It's about serving people something that brings them joy, that brings them together, that maybe even reminds them that transformation is always possible."

The Legacy

As Rise N' Smoke has grown from Mike's weekend experiments to Hillsboro's premier BBQ destination, the heart of the operation remains unchanged. It's still about the perfect smoke, still about transformation, still about serving others with excellence.

"This isn't just my restaurant," Mike says, "This is our community's place. Where people come not just for great food, but for the experience of tasting what happens when science, faith, and love for others all come together."

And every day, as the smoke rises from Mike's precisely calibrated smokers, carrying its transformative magic deep into another perfect brisket, the story continues—one plate, one family, one moment of delicious revelation at a time.

"When smoke rises just right, it doesn't just flavor the meat—it transforms it. Same thing happens in life when you trust the process and have faith in the outcome." - *Michael Johnson, Owner & SmokeMaster, Rise N' Smoke Pitt BBQ*