

Grill master shares his passion

By Kevin Zimmerman/ Staff Writer
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They say the first step is to admit you have a problem. Then, you should find similarly affected people to talk about the issue, to share thoughts on the subject and to help each other cope. So, that's exactly what Parkerville Road resident Arnie Tomaino did.

Tomaino's addiction is backyard grilling and his 12-step group is his recently launched Web site, GrillJunkie.com. "People would tell me, 'You're obsessed. You're an addict,'" said Tomaino. "That's where the name came from."

Started by Tomaino, 42, and his wife, Shelagh, GrillJunkie now sports a team of grillers from around the country who adhere to the Tomainos' grill creed: "To celebrate and express the healthy addiction that we share for grilling and the time that we share with family and friends. As Tomaino said, "anytime you smell the barbecue, there are friends and family around."

Internet visitors can log on to discover dozens of grilling recipes, barbecuing safety tips and even a line of GrillJunkie T-shirts, with Tomaino's slogan, "What Fires You Up?"

"I'm not a guru," said Tomaino. "I'm passionate about it and able to talk about it. That's the thing with any club, you share information with others." Growing up in Danbury, Conn., Tomaino learned a lot about grilling from his parents who would just as likely cook outdoors as in the kitchen. Tomaino's Italian parents would share the cooking duties and passed their knowledge onto their son. "Find me an Italian who doesn't cook," said Tomaino.

An annual highlight was the Americo Vespucci Club's Field Day where thousands of people would gather for a giant outdoor grilling festival. Back then, club members didn't haul in Webers but rather created grills by cutting large metal barrels in half, and filling the guts with charcoal or wood then tossing on peppers and sausage or burgers and steaks.

While Tomaino still earns raves for his steaks - his father-in-law claims they're the best ever - Tomaino has expanded his grilling repertoire to include all types of poultry, fish and even pizza. "Grilled pizza is probably my specialty," he said. "You grill one side [of the dough] first, then basically you create a dry, high-heat environment, like an oven."

It's here that Tomaino takes the talk beyond the standard weekend warrior rallying cries. When it comes to grilling, backyard chefs fall into three camps, said Tomaino. There are those who only use charcoal briquettes - but they would never use ones already treated with lighter fluid. The second group swears by propane or other natural gas grills. And, then, there's the barbecue camp, who use either charcoals or gas, but adhere to the strict rules of barbecuing which - and this may come as a surprise to the uninitiated - is different from grilling. Grilling involves cooking over a direct heat source; barbecuing cooks food through the use of indirect heat.

"Barbecuing is a slow-cook method," said Tomaino. "There are a lot of things that you can do both, but something like a brisket, ribs or a side of beef should be barbecued." No matter how someone uses a grill, Tomaino hopes they realize outdoor cooking doesn't have to be limited to summertime.

Drop by his home following a snowstorm and you see that he's shoveled out the driveway, front walkway and a path from the backdoor to his Char-Broil grill.

"To me it's an American past time," he said. "It's just a different atmosphere when you take cooking outside. Cooking inside is a chore. It's not a chore out here."

GrillJunkie wares are available locally at Agway on Maple Road and Aubuchon Hardware on Summer Street. More information is also available on line at www.GrillJunkie.com.

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