

Chelmsford ‘grill junkie’ takes act to the Web

By MARIE DONOVAN

Sun Correspondent

CHELMSFORD — Arnie Tomaino’s addiction began when he was a child growing up in Danbury, Conn.

As an adult, the addiction became even stronger; Tomaino began going out in his Chelmsford back yard during brutal New England winter storms to light up, engendering the ridicule of his wife, Shea.

“Unless it’s completely frozen outside, you just sweep the snow off,” said Tomaino, now 42.

Banking that he is not alone, Tomaino founded www.grilljunkie.com last month.

“It’s a healthy addiction,” Tomaino insists.

In addition to serving as an outlet for him to talk about his own addiction to backyard grilling, Tomaino, a high-tech marketing and communications consultant, hopes the Web site will help what could be millions of the similar enthusiasts across the country.

“Outdoor grilling is an American pastime. As you’re driving or riding a bike through a neighborhood and somebody’s got a grill going, to me it just smells like America,” he says.

The Web site offers answers to frequently asked grilling questions, along with recipes and tips on everything from marinades to smoke chips and grill cleaning. It’s also a merchandise mart for the black and red Grilljunkie logo-emblazoned clothing and accessories line Tomaino designed himself.

With prices ranging from \$2.99 to \$29.99, the line includes aprons, baseball hats, tote bags, journals, magnets, beverage steins and tile coasters, plus all manner of shirts, from T’s for both humans and dogs, golf-style polos and hoodies to baseball shirts and spaghetti strap tanks for girls.

Tomaino has a procurement company, California-based CafePress, that fulfills online orders; Tomaino receives a cut of each sale. A local vendor, Chelmsford-based EmbroidMe, supplies local retailers.

Grilljunkie merchandise is also available locally at Aubuchon Hardware in Chelmsford and at Agway stores in Chelmsford, Littleton, Fitchburg and Leominster.

According to The National Barbecue Association, May is National Barbecue Month. But for Tomaino, grilling is a year-round event.

Tomaino said there’s no way he’d rather spend a Saturday afternoon than back-yard barbecuing over the open flame in his pressed-steel grate, oversized Charbroil gas grill, listening to a Red Sox game on AM-1030 with Shea, his three kids and family friends.

Despite her teasing, Shea Hogan Tomaino enjoys grilling, too, and is a partner in the Grilljunkie business.

“We both share a passion for great food,” Tomaino said.

His father and both sets of grandparents, natives of Calabria and Florence, Italy, respectively, shared their love of outdoor grilling with him as a child.

“Food is part of who Italians are. When I was growing up, I was always grilling and cooking in the back yard. My family was very famous for making homemade pepperoni and sausage; the smells were just mesmerizing,” Tomaino said.

Just last week, Tomaino began displaying Grilljunkie marketing materials for T-shirts and other apparel and accessories at Comets Diner in Tyngsboro — his daily pre-work coffee fueling station.

“I liked the shirt so much, I bought three,” Comets owner/chef Michael Reitano said.