

## A l u m n i P r o f i l e



## Squeal of a meal

*Jim Early's book plugs the palatable pleasures of pork*

Barbecue is the “All-American” casual food. Served Lexington-style or with Carolina Pig Pickin’, chopped or pulled, red slaw or whiteslaw, its followers will drive hundreds of miles to a distant hamlet in search of a ‘pretty pig,’ says Jim Early (’62, JD ’64). And in Early’s family, they ate everything but the squeal.

A native of Henderson, North Carolina, a small eastern town near the Virginia border, he has been a longtime resident of Winston-Salem. Early inherited his love of cooking from his mother, Nettie Hicks Early, and her family. They all regarded eating as a form of celebration, and good barbecue was often at the heart of the festivities. Steeped in this atmosphere of great country cooking and

family recipes handed down over generations, Early took the basics of cooking and perfected those skills, developing a flair for gourmet cooking.

In addition to a love of barbecue and fine cooking, Early’s upbringing taught him principles that have shaped his life, he says, such as fair play, caring, and reaching out to those who need a hand. This passion inspired him to research and write *The Best Tarheel Barbecue, Manteo to Murphy*, a book dedicated totally to the topic of North Carolina barbecue, with history, chef critiques, recipes, and the personal stories of those who raise the hogs, cook the barbecue, and of those who eat it. He hopes that over the years the proceeds from this book will exceed \$1 million, which he plans to donate to the Special Olympics, North Carolina. Early will sign copies of his book from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, October 12, at the Homecoming Festival on the Quad.

For six months, Early crammed a 50-hour-a-week law practice in Winston-Salem into four workdays. Leaving each week on Thursday evening and returning Sunday night, he traveled through North Carolina’s 100 counties, drove more than 18,000 miles, talked with more than 1,500 people and checked out more than 200 barbecue places, critiquing 140 for his book. With nothing more than a state map spread out on the seat of his car, he traveled the four regions of the Tarheel state, each region’s boundaries determined by how his map lay folded.

He found barbecue places on main streets, back alleys, hidden in rolling valleys or on long dusty stretches of the flat coastal plains. He drove back roads, stopped at filling stations, country stores, and fire stations, to ask those he met the all-important question: “If your best friend was celebrating his birthday today and wanted to eat barbecue, where in the

