



IMAGE OF BOOK BY BERT VANDERVEEN

# Wildcat Country

In this Sampson County community, residents rally around food and football.

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**K**ATIE VANN DOESN'T LIKE FOOTBALL, but she never misses a Hobbton High School game. She works concessions, making the food that feeds the fans.

So when Vann, Hobbton's career counselor, came down with a virus on a Thursday afternoon earlier this fall, she went home and straight to bed. She knew that if she started resting immediately, the virus would last only 24 hours — just enough time to get her back for Hobbton's Friday night football game.

You can't keep a Hobbton fan away from her Wildcats or her cooking.

Located just outside the rural Sampson County town of Newton Grove, Hobbton graduates devoted alumni and hearty cooks, and the two come together in a 343-page cookbook that's as thick with school spirit as it is recipes.

All the recipes in *Wildcat Country Cooking* come from people connected to Hobbton High School — teachers, counselors, coaches, former students, current students, future students.

Vann, for instance, didn't graduate from Hobbton; she's from just across the county line in Wayne County. But she met a Hobbton boy on the old "circle" in Newton Grove one year, married him, moved to Sampson County, and took a job as the career counselor at Hobbton in 1984. She's been here ever since, and both of her sons graduated from Hobbton.

She contributed a recipe for a pimento-cheese spread.

The front of the cookbook includes a six-page history of the school, followed by the Hobbton alma mater, which includes the line, "Hail to the finest school of all, the school we love so dear."

That love shines in the descriptions of the people who sent the recipes.

Lauren Strickland graduated in 2001, and she



## Southern Baked Beans

- ½ pound bacon
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 (16-ounce) can pork and beans
- 3 tablespoons yellow mustard
- 5 tablespoons maple or pancake syrup
- 4 tablespoons ketchup

Preheat oven to 325°. Fry bacon until crisp; crumble. In bacon drippings, sauté onion until brown. Mix bacon, onion, and drippings with remaining ingredients. Pour into casserole dish, and bake covered for 45-60 minutes.

works as a media specialist at Hargrove Elementary School, the feeder school for Hobbton. Strickland is a third-generation Hobbton graduate.

She contributed a recipe for Southern baked beans.

Anne Wicke-Bass didn't graduate from Hobbton, but she moved to the area about a decade ago and became an active member of the school and community. She worked as the job coach at Hobbton High School, and now is a teacher's assistant at the elementary school.

She contributed a recipe called Wildcat Rib Rub by Jimmy the B.

Betty Marshburn is a cafeteria employee and bus driver known throughout the school for her big personality.

She contributed a recipe named Big Ol' Mess.

Larry Britt started his career as a teacher at the elementary school in the 1970s. Then he took over the NAPA Auto Parts store for a couple of decades. Then he left auto parts and taught math at Hobbton Middle School from 2000-2010. Now he's back working on cars. And he also volunteers with the fire department.

"Larry Britt is one of the finest men in Newton Grove," Vann says. "He's always working, and he's always got friends and family around him."

Britt contributed a recipe called Tom's BBQ Sauce for Chicken, named for his dad.

And then there's Grace Casey Sinclair. She was a member of Hobbton's first graduating class, in 1957. She married a farmer, and all three of her children graduated from Hobbton in the 1980s. She still lives here.

And she contributed a recipe for spicy apple cider, just right for a fall Friday evening at the stadium. 🍂

*Michael Graff is the associate editor of Our State magazine.*

*For a copy of the cookbook, call Hobbton High School at (910) 594-0242.*



### Spicy Apple Cider

- 1 gallon apple cider
- ¼ cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 20 whole cloves
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 4 (4-inch) cinnamon sticks
- 1 (6-ounce) can orange juice
- ½ cup lemon juice

Add brown sugar, cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon sticks to apple cider. Bring mixture to a boil, and reduce heat. Simmer for 10 minutes, and then strain through a thin cloth. Add orange juice and lemon juice to the mixture, and stir.



### Big Ol' Mess

- 1 pound smoked sausage, cut into chunks
- 3 jalapeño peppers, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, cut into bite-size chunks
- 1 sweet onion, cut into bite-size chunks
- ¼ cup Tabasco sauce
- 1 (10-ounce) jar sweet and sour sauce
- 1 foil bag or 2 pieces of tinfoil

Place sausage, peppers, and onion in foil bag. In a small bowl, mix Tabasco sauce and sweet and sour sauce. Pour over sausage, peppers, and onions. Seal foil bag tightly, and place on grill. Cook for about 45 minutes, turning every 15 minutes. Split open, and serve immediately.



### Tom's BBQ Sauce for Chicken

*This recipe serves 50 people.*

- 2 pounds onions, diced
- 4 pounds margarine
- 1 quart honey
- 6 bottles Worcestershire sauce
- 1 gallon ketchup
- 1 pound brown sugar
- 2 pounds sugar
- 6 large bottles A.1. Steak Sauce
- 1 (20-ounce) bottle lemon juice
- 1 quart molasses
- Red pepper and black pepper to taste

Cook onions in 2 quarts water and margarine until tender; add all other ingredients one at a time, and stir well. Make sure sugar is well melted, stirring constantly. Bring to a boil, and then simmer for 30 minutes. Store container in refrigerator for future use.

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### Wildcat Rib Rub by Jimmy the B

- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon cumin seeds, toasted\*
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon coriander seeds, toasted\*
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  pieces dried chipotle peppers, toasted\* and seeds removed
- 2 teaspoons sun-dried tomatoes, diced, not packed in oil (optional)
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon powdered mustard
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon black peppercorns

Place all the ingredients in a food processor or spice grinder, and pulse until the spices are well blended. Remove the large pieces of sun-dried tomatoes, if using. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 weeks.

\*To toast the cumin and coriander seeds, place a small skillet over medium heat. Add the seeds (do this in separate batches) and toast, shaking the pan occasionally, until the spices are fragrant, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a heatproof bowl to cool completely. To toast the dried chipotle peppers, place them in a dry skillet over moderate heat for 1 to 2 minutes, watching carefully so they don't burn.

