

Zach and Lou's Barbecue new part of Burrville history

BY JOSIE ALBERTSON-GROVE
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

TORRINGTON — Zach and Lou's Barbecue has been serving ribs and brisket in Burrville for a few weeks, but the restaurant celebrated a grand opening on Tuesday. In front of about 30 people, Mayor Elinor C. Carbone cut a sparkly orange ribbon with a pair of purple scissors about as big as a tennis racket.

Lou Gabriel, one of the restaurant's owners, watched the proceedings from an orange tent, standing beside the torpedo-shaped meat smoker full of butts and brisket. Each gust of wind sent eye-watering wood smoke into the tent.

"It's been crazy busy," he said of the first few weeks of business, with many customers coming for lunch from nearby businesses.

"People have been lining up before opening."

The restaurant is named for Gabriel and his son, Zach, who worked behind the counter during the opening rush. Zach Gabriel, 30, said his father was not always a chef, but started cooking to preserve family recipes, the Italian pastas and sauces he grew up on. The Gabriels also threw big backyard parties every summer, and barbecue quickly became part of the family's tradition.

"I started out on a 22-inch Weber grill," said Lou Gabriel. He tinkered with the recipes over the years, collected feedback from his guests, and graduated to bigger, more elaborate cooking equipment.

In 2011, Gabriel started a catering-vending business, grilling and smoking meat



Lou Gabriel, with ribs he will smoke for five hours before serving them at Zach and Lou's Barbecue, the Torrington restaurant he and his son have opened.

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part-time while he worked an office job. He was doing brisk business, but opening a restaurant was still a big risk,

he said.

The shift wasn't entirely voluntary. In May, Gabriel was laid off. But in the set-

back, Gabriel saw an opportunity.

"When they let me go, they did me a favor," Gabriel said.

grinning. "I wasn't really a big fan of the corporate world." And he worried his age — almost 60 — would make it hard to find another job.

Gabriel said he started looking for a building for the barbecue restaurant that day. He hoped to find a space in downtown Torrington, but couldn't find a building equipped to be a restaurant, with the right ventilation and a walk-in cooler. His wife spotted the old Burrville store on Winsted Road, across the street from the old Burrville fire department.

The building has been a railroad depot, a general store, and a gas station through its life, said Gabriel. Now, it's a barbecue joint.

"We're part of Burrville history now, part of the history of the building," he said.