



**2026 TUNICA RIVERGATE FESTIVAL BARBECUE COOKING CONTEST
BROUGHT TO YOU BY WASTE MANAGEMENT and Neel-Schaffer**

BBQ TEAM LOAD – IN AND PARK RULES 2026

1. Spaces will be assigned using the following process: on Thursday, April 16th a maximum of TWO representatives from each team will meet outside the Main Street Events Building at 1229 Main Street in downtown Tunica. This location is also the turn-in location for the competition. Representatives will randomly draw numbers. In order to draw a number you must have filled out an application and paid your \$100 entry fee via the Rib Cookoff Association website. The number you draw is the order in which you will get to choose your location. The team who draws number one will have first choice at what spot they want, and so on. Spots will be clearly marked on Thursday night. As soon as all spaces are chosen, teams may begin loading into their chosen spaces on Thursday evening.
2. The Festival is not liable for any of your possessions or equipment that are lost, damaged or stolen, so set up at your own risk. If a representative from your team is not able to attend on Thursday night, one of the Rivergate volunteers will communicate with you in advance, and act in your place.
3. No stakes can be driven into the pavement or grassy areas because of underground sprinkler systems. Fences and tent must be free-standing. Please plan accordingly before arriving in Tunica.
4. It is the responsibility of each team to see that their contest area is kept clean. Please make sure your team area is free of debris, ashes, and grease.
5. Electricity and water will be available for teams. Bring your own extension cords, water hoses, and hose splitters.
6. The Chief Cook (name on application) will be held responsible for the conduct of his/her team and guests. Any alcoholic beverages must be consumed from a non-transparent plastic or paper cup. **NO CANS OR GLASS CONTAINERS WILL BE ALLOWED, EVEN WITH CONCEALED WITH 'HUGGIE.'**
7. There is a zero tolerance policy on abusive language or behavior. This includes but is not limited to interactions within your team, with another team, or directed at the Festival Director, Volunteers, or Town of Tunica employees. Anyone in violation of this rule will result in the entire team being disqualified from the current event, and banned from all future Tunica Main Street Sponsored Cook Offs. Again this is a ZERO TOLERANCE policy.
8. **CORPORATE SIGNAGE:** In consideration of Festival sponsors, we are requiring that you display **ONLY ONE** corporate logo identification no larger than 2 feet by 6 feet with no higher than 8 feet off the ground at the highest point. Signage control is at the discretion of the barbeque organizers.
9. The Town of Tunica and all other Tunica Rivergate Festival representatives and associated parties will not be held responsible for tents, cookers, equipment, and/or other personal items left on grounds before, during, or after the contest.

10. Our generous sponsors, Waste Management and Neel-Schaffer, will have a hospitality tent on the festival grounds. At some point Saturday, each cook team is required to deliver a tasting of one or more of their dishes to the sponsor's hospitality tent. Please supply a sample tasting of one or more of your dishes for approximately 5-10 people. This contribution is not taken into account during the judging process but it is required of you as a team. This festival would not be possible without our valued sponsors and this is a part of our contractual agreement with them. The Rivergate Festival will provide all plates, napkins, utensils, and drinks (although I'm sure they would not turn down a sampling of your wonderful Bloody Marys and Margaritas!). Please don't over think this! Half a slab of ribs or your favorite tailgate dip will suffice! It doesn't have to be something you are turning in for judging.
11. People's Choice Drink Awards: Last year our very first People's Choice Drink Contest was a huge hit and very well attended! This People's Choice style competition and we will treat it as a fund raiser for Tunica Main Street. The Main Street program in Tunica offers year-round free events to the entire community, offers support to our small businesses, and has managed recent sustainable beautification projects such as Mural Park and The Rivergate Park Improvement Project. Every dollar counts as we continue our efforts to offer these amenities to our town! So, here's how it will work:
- The public is invited to purchase drink passes for \$15 each. \$15 for Bloody Mary's, \$15 for Margaritas.
 - They will visit your BBQ tents and present their passes. You will be supplied with a 3oz tasting cup and are able to offer samples to the guests. It is up to your discretion how many samples you pass out, but remember that the more samples you pass out, the more likely you are to win! 😊
 - After enjoying the samples, guests will return to the Tunica Main Street Tent and cast their vote. They will then get a 12oz cup and be able to return to their favorite team and have a full-size drink!
 - Trophies will be awarded to the top three teams in each category.
 - We hope that this offers a way for the community to get involved, meet some of our regionally famous BBQ teams and create a fun, all-inclusive event...while making a little money for Tunica Main Street!
Thank you for your support in our efforts and for continuing to make Tunica a great place to live and visit!
12. Cook-Off Schedule (subject to change)
- a. Thursday, April 16th: a maximum of TWO representatives from each team will meet outside the Main Street Events Building at 5pm to draw for spots. Teams will be allowed to begin load in to their chosen space.
 - b. Friday, April 17th: Load in continues at Rivergate Park throughout the day. 6:00pm Load-in ends. ABSOLUTELY NO loading in by car after this time. By 6pm on Friday the foot traffic is heavy and the line for crawfish is long. Golf Carts will be allowed in the BBQ Team area all weekend. Please be careful.
 - c. Saturday, April 18th:
 - i. 8:00am Set up continued. Teams may continue loading in on Saturday morning but you are encouraged to have the majority of your area set up on Friday night.
 - ii. 9:00am Teams must be set up and checked in by 9am on Saturday. Cook Team Meeting at the Main Street Events Building. A minimum of one representative from your team must attend the Cook Team Meeting at this time, to compete in the contest.
 - iii. 11:00am: We will begin to sell tickets for People's Choice Drink Contest (see below for contest details. We will stop selling at 1pm). Judges meeting also takes place at this time.
 - iv. 12:00pm Wings Turn in
 - v. 1:00pm Beef Turn In
 - vi. 2:00pm Ribs Turn In
 - vii. 3:00pm Results announced on the Rivergate Amphitheatre Stage.
13. All other specifics for this contest will abide by the rules set forth by the Rib Cookoff Association. Those rules can be found on their website at <https://www.ribcookoffassociation.com/rules-and-details>.