

# PRESERVATION FORWARD



2023 LANDMARKS ILLINOIS INFLUENCER

## AMY MILLS

*Owner, 17th Street Barbecue, Faye, and The Factory at 17th Street*

Amy Mills may have tried to run fast and far from the family business of barbecue, but she ended up becoming a true visionary in the industry's male-dominated world. Her Dad, the late legendary pitmaster Mike Mills, taught her how to cook with fire while growing up in Murphysboro, Illinois, but Amy embarked on a marketing career instead, first in Dallas, then Boston. Amy offered advice for her family's restaurant 17th Street Barbecue though whenever her father asked. "You can cook the very best food in the world," Amy often says, "but if you can't tell a story that gets people interested in it, no one will buy it."

With Amy's storytelling skills, 17th Street Barbecue turned into a best-seller. It received glorious reviews, numerous awards, and brought people around the world to a tiny town in Southern Illinois that has been in economic downfall ever since the closing of factories and coal mines. After Amy officially returned in 2000, she solidified the business's revered place in the church of barbecue by developing a mail order business and turning the annual Praise the Lard barbecue competition into an essential stop on the competition circuit. She also created OnCue Consulting, the only barbecue business consultancy in the world. In 2005, Amy won a James Beard Foundation nomination for co-writing Peace, Love and Barbecue.

Now Amy has her own story to tell. It's the culmination of everything she's learned in business and in life. And it's about giving back to a town that's always embraced her, even when she refused to stay put. She's been busy restoring a dilapidated building--a former Essex car dealership--in the center of town. She's calling it Faye, an acknowledgement of Amy's paternal grandmother -- lovingly referred to as Mama Faye -- and her indelible contributions to 17th Street Barbecue sauces, a Mills tradition that started in the 1930s in her kitchen. In a nod to the vibrant past of Murphysboro, Amy's goal is to bring jobs and industry back to the town after years of economic decline and inspire other entrepreneurs to help make Murphysboro thrive again.

Part of the building is an actual sauce factory. In addition to producing their own products, she will offer co-packing services, so other culinary entrepreneurs can maintain control of their recipes and launch private labels. In the front, taking over the former showroom, there is a gourmet retail area personally curated by Amy, a fast-casual breakfast spot, a comfy lounge for hanging out, and lots of delicious coffee in house or via drive-thru. There is a beautiful patio, with outdoor dining, three fire pits, and a games area that is also available for party rentals.

Designing the Factory from scratch has been a real labor of love for Amy. She admits it's a little fancier than her dad would have designed it, but it follows the gospel of the Mills family. "Work is way more fun and impactful when it's about more than just you," says Amy. "Generosity is the ultimate recipe for success."



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