

Lake County Chamber toasts 'Famous Dave' at new resort

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GURNEE -- As emcee Chuck Crowley told the capacity crowd at Friday night's Lake County Chamber of Commerce annual dinner, the festivities were being held "in the home that has been built by Famous Dave."

Dave Anderson, the name behind Famous Dave's Legendary Pit Bar-B-Que, is also the money behind the new KeyLime Cove Water Resort on Nations Drive, and his employees broke in their banquet facilities with the chamber dinner.

After being introduced by Crowley as "a man who tackles the impossible and then looks for what is left for breakfast," Anderson told the gathering of some 250 about his roots on Chicago's West Side, being raised by a Choctaw father and Ojibwa mother.

"I feel honored to be able to be here (and) share my life story," said Anderson, a bear-sized man dressed in his trademark tropical shirt and baseball cap. "As a kid growing up on the West Side, I didn't grow up on the right side of the tracks."

But what he did have, Anderson added, were two hard-working parents who provided enough means for him to dream. He recalled how his blue-collar father would come home from time to time with barbecued ribs picked up from co-workers at job sites like the Sears Tower.

"I can remember when my dad would bring home one of those lunch buckets full of ribs, and I could smell it when I came in from playing," he said. "I remember thinking, 'When I grow up, I'm going to be a barbecue king.'"

Anderson -- who said he spent his school days "in the bottom half that made the top half possible" -- eventually earned a master's degree in public administration at Harvard and rolled through some challenges before opening the first Famous Dave's near Hayward, Wis., in 1994.

He told the crowd that "if you're willing to dream and never give up, incredible things can happen for you in this country" -- and he also prodded them to get involved in the 2008 election.

"We need participation, we need people to get off their butts, we need to get the economy going," he said.

"And the only people who can make that happen are here in this room, because we all know the folks in Washington aren't going to do it."