

Go Hog Wild

By **Danielle Wong Moores**

Photos courtesy of Kathy Beasley

The Saturday after Thanksgiving, they say that a certain aroma starts to linger around the town of Salley, South Carolina. Perhaps best described by words you wouldn't see printed and wouldn't dare say in front of your mama.

True or not, that myth has done nothing to dispel the eager appetites of the roughly 30,000 attendees who overflow the sleepy town — population 410 counting the cats and dogs, jokes Salley mayor Bob Salley — every November during the annual Chitlin' Strut.

And what is a chitlin', you ask? For the uninitiated, the chitlin', or chitterling if you want to be proper about it, is the rubbery intestine of a pig. Cleaned thoroughly and parboiled until tender, it is then ready to be cooked a variety of ways. It may take a strong stomach to read about how carefully chitlins must be cleaned (soaked and rinsed in several changes of water and picked clean by hand to remove undigested food, fat and other — ahem — *items* from the folds of intestine), and an even stronger stomach to consider eating them once you consider what's involved in their preparation.

But so many chitlin' devotees can't be wrong. According to Mayor Salley, who counts himself among that number, the town now purchases its chitlins precooked so that the strong odor of yore that would rise up as the chitlins were parboiled in the hours before the festival is now mostly a thing of the past. Now the chitlins are simply thawed, ready to be cooked with onions and other flavorings and served over rice, or dredged in flour, salt and pepper, deep-fried and eaten like a pork rind. Mayor Salley's personal preference? The fried chitlin', served with Texas

Pete and a side of bread, all washed down with sweet tea.

Ever since the strut was first dreamed up as a fund-raiser back in 1966 to help the town replace its tired Christmas decorations, its popularity has been undeniable. The first festival drew more than 1,000 attendees and has grown ever since, with as many as 60,000 reported from places as far away as Canada and Michigan.

Salley now devotes much of the month of November to the strut, with the Chitlin' Queen beauty pageant and Chitlin' Strut Idol just a couple of the events in the days leading up to the main event, which takes place on November 27 this year.

New last year was the Chitlin' Eating Contest. "It's the first time in the history of the world that we know of that there's been a world championship chitlin' eating contest," said Mayor Salley.

The strut also includes a parade at 10 a.m., carnival rides and games, arts and crafts, festival foods, a Hawg Calling Contest and concert. But the star, undeniably, remains the lowly innard. Whether you eat chitlins — if you dare — for breakfast, lunch or dinner (the strut opens at 8 a.m.), the Salley Chitlin' Strut will satisfy your cravings, and then some.

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If You Go:

What: 45th Annual Chitlin' Strut

When: 8 a.m. Saturday, November 27 (related events earlier in the month)

Where: Salley, South Carolina (halfway between Augusta and Columbia)

How Much: Admission is free

For Info: (803) 258-3485 or visit www.chitlinstrut.com