

Smoking meats or smoke and mirrors? Controversy follows Greene County eatery

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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CARROLLTON - The owner of a Greene County barbecue joint feels she is the victim of small town politics, but members of the **Greene County Board** assert otherwise.

Hog Daddy BBQ started as a small set-up in Carrollton, vending barbecue on the corner near the courthouse. The food made by **Sherry and Rich Stewart** had such a reputation they were offered a brick-and-mortar location by property owner **Shelli Martin**. Rich Stewart said taking that opportunity was the beginning of things going sour for his wife's establishment.

After what started as a silent partnership between Sherry Stewart and Martin devolved into a dispute settled in court on June 17, Hog Daddy BBQ is being forced to exit its current location at 424 Main St. in Carrollton and move outside village limits to a location off of Route 67 formerly known as the "**Hunters' Horn**." This would have been well and good with the Stewarts, except their proposal for a liquor license from Greene County was voted down 5-2 without discussion at the most recent board meeting.

That vote was described as "unprecedented" by **Greene County Board Chairperson Joe Nord**, who voted in favor of the liquor licensing. Nord has been on the board since the early 1970s, and said he had never seen a liquor license get voted down. He said he heard there were concerns between the Stewarts and an adjacent property owner at the new location-- a claim Rich Stewart denies.

"We have no problems with any property owners around the old Hunters' Horn," he said. "I don't know where he is getting that from."

Other board members cited the location and alcohol in general as the reasons behind their "no" votes. **Greene County Board Member and Greenfield Police Chief John Goode** said he would vote against any business he believes will encourage drinking and driving.

"I am a law enforcement officer, and any time I am asked to vote for a liquor license, I will vote no," Goode said. "Any restaurant serving alcohol while you eat will increase the risk of drinking and driving as well as motor vehicle accidents and DUIs."

Goode said he did not discuss his no vote or the liquor license, stating his vote was discussion enough.

"You vote no and move on, or vote yes and move on," he said. "There is no need for discussion after that."

Another **Greene County Board Member Randy Custer**, who voted no, did not wish to comment on the reasons behind his vote, but stated he "voted with his conscience," adding he "could not comment as to why other people voted the way they did."

That sentiment was echoed by board member **Mark Strang**. Strang voted yes for the licensing, but stated he was "not responsible for changing other people's votes." He said he voted yes because the Greene County State's Attorney said they passed a background check.

"You're a fool if you don't take your attorney's advice," Strang said.

Strang added he was aware of the controversy currently surrounding Hog Daddy BBQ since the court case in June.

"It's a small town," he said. "It's hard not to hear about something going on."

Rich Stewart feels that small town mentality is part of the reason why his wife's business was denied a liquor license from the county, despite already being licensed by both the **Village of Carrollton** and the **State of Illinois**. He said that mentality has haunted him and his wife since they moved from Wisconsin to operate this business. He speaks on behalf of the business due to a recent court settlement placing a gag order on his wife, preventing her from commenting on the issues around the business. He is not the owner of the business, nor does he collect a paycheck from the business.



After going into business with Martin as a silent partner, Rich Stewart said Martin wanted a return on her investment shortly after Hog Daddy BBQ started showing massive profits. After telling her it was too soon for that, Rich Stewart said her silent partnership was becoming less than silent. Rich Stewart said his wife offered to buyout Martin's share after he said her input on the business went from silent to overbearing. After telling her that, Rich Stewart said Martin called the **Greene County Sheriff** and served the couple with "no trespassing" papers.

Those papers accused Sherry Stewart of not being who she claimed she was. After moving from Wisconsin to Illinois, Sherry Stewart did not change her name on her driver's license to Sherry Stewart from her maiden name of **Sherry Schehr**. Rich Stewart said this was due to her operating a bar in Wisconsin called **Schehr's Wagon Wheel**. This was partially in honor of Sherry Stewart's mother, who shared the last name Schehr, working there for the past 50 years.

After the Stewarts were banned from the property due to allegations of fraud, Rich Stewart said Martin and her son, **Carrollton Village Clerk Ryan Scott**, continued to operate the business for a week. Rich Stewart said he had many questions about this, due to many of the licenses being illegitimate while Sherry Stewart sorted the disputes involving her identity. He said the business's largest-sized food vendor, **U.S. Foods**, refused to operate with the business during this time. He said that vendor's legal team suspended operations with Hog Daddy BBQ while the dispute was sorted. Many of the smaller vendors continued operations as usual.

Martin refused to comment on the matter, but stated she was no longer associated with Hog Daddy BBQ.

Greene County Board Member Luke Lamb said he voted against the liquor license because of that identity dispute. He was alerted by a "concerned citizen" to that issue, which influenced his voting against the liquor license. He has since spoken to Sherry Stewart, who he described as seeming nice and on the up-and-up about things.

"I wanted to look more into the identity issue before voting yes," Lamb said. "I have been able to speak with Sherry since, and have agreed to the need for a special meeting."

Lamb said he advised Sherry Stewart in how to approach the Greene County Board when or if the issue comes to a vote again. He said he did not appreciate Rich Stewart accusing the board of corruption.

"We're not a corrupt board," Lamb said. "I have seen a lot of things during my time on the board, and I do not appreciate being blanketed as corrupt."

Lamb also described himself as "pro-business," and said he would support any new business promising to bring more revenue and employment to the county.

Revenue is something Rich Stewart promises if his wife was given the liquor license for the business. He said the addition of alcohol sales and video gaming, which requires a liquor license to be established, could earn the county as much as \$10,000 a year. He said the county treasurer backs this figure and calculated a nearly identical figure when approached by the Stewarts.

Hog Daddy BBQ also currently employs eight Greene County residents. Rich Stewart said an additional two would be required at the new location, including a full-time bartender to tend to the 14 stools at the new location's full bar. If things were continuing to run as usual, Rich Stewart said in a SMS message, payroll would have contributed as much as \$100,000 into county economics.



"Without that liquor license, we and the county lose two streams of revenue from both alcohol sales and video gaming," he said.

Rich Stewart said Hog Daddy BBQ will be opening at the former Hunters' Horn after being forced to vacate their current location Aug. 1 with or without a liquor license. The business will still serve various forms of smoked and grilled meats, even if they are barred from serving alcohol by the county.

Greene County Board Member Joyce Clark said the new location causes safety concerns for her. She claimed to have not heard any complaints about the business, but said she was concerned about people pulling out onto Highway 67 after drinking at the establishment. Rich Stewart described her reasoning as "ludicrous."

"In regards to Joyce Clark, that business has been there for 66 years, and has had a liquor license for at least 60 years," he said. "And, you can see almost a mile in either direction when pulling out into the highway."

The Stewarts hope the Greene County Board will call a special meeting, which requires three board members to approve, or that the board will take another vote at their regular meeting regarding the liquor license. The county does not usually handle liquor licensing, however. Strang said the county itself usually handles as few as three such licenses, saying they are usually handled by cities and villages.

Currently, the Stewarts have the support of Lamb for the special meeting, but were notified Monday morning they would not have the support of Strang.

"He won't set it up, as he thinks members won't change their votes," Rich Stewart said in an SMS message. "We said we wanted to present our side to persuade them. He won't do it now."

Rich Stewart said he hopes his wife's next shot at getting a liquor license goes better. He said he wishes those who stated they were against the consumption of alcohol would abstain from the vote.

"We are a restaurant which happens to serve alcohol," he said. "First and foremost, we are a restaurant. Do the people who vote against things based on alcohol vote against gas stations as well? They require liquor licenses too."

An email was sent to **Greene County Board Member Mike McNear**, who voted no, for comment. That email was not returned.