



If you go

What: Rankin County
Wild Game Dinner

When: 5 p.m. Saturday (vendors,
interactive kids exhibits), 6 p.m. dinner

Where: Hinds Community College's
Clyde Muse Center, 515 Country Place
Parkway, Pearl

Cost: \$25

Contact: 601-825-5958
or 601-420-0000

Ramsey Russell, owner of GetDucks.com, a global hunting travel agency, displays a few of his favorite duck dishes at his home in Brandon. Russell will be a vendor at Saturday's Rankin County Wild Game Banquet, which will benefit Habitat for Humanity Mississippi Capital Area

ELIJAH BAYLIS/THE CLARION-LEDGER

HUNTER'S DUCK-TO-DELISH TIPS

TASTE

ON THE

WILD SIDE



**Sherry
Lucas**

THE CLARION-LEDGER

Ramsey Russell puts the skewered duck poppers on his Bayou Classic Cypress Grill with a sizzle and a smile. The bacon wrap's aroma whets the appetite of anyone within nose shot. Whiffs deepen, with meaty duck sub-notes and a whisper of sweetness and tart wafting along after it. Pineapple maybe? Ginger? Both?

GetDucks.com duck hunt expert Russell, organizer of hunting adventures around the globe, was at that moment on his own Brandon back porch.

"I'm not a cook or a chef," he said over savory samples threatening to



Watch more from Ramsey Russell. clarionledger.com

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contradict him. "I guess my thing is just camp food." He gives the grill a quick glance. "It'll look good when that bacon gets going." No doubt.

This is "man food," with a know-how sourced from hunting camps around the world, but especially Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana. "We're the best cooks in the country."

Russell will be one of the wildlife vendors at Saturday's Rankin County Wild Game Dinner at the Muse Center in Pearl, benefiting Habitat for Humanity Mississippi Capital Area. It's sponsored by the Rankin County United Methodist Men, a coalition of men's ministry groups.

Vendor booths and interactive exhibits for kids will be open at 5 p.m., followed by a 6 p.m. dinner with wild game samples including deer poppers, deer sausage, duck gumbo and fish as well as Dickey's Barbecue. Legendary football player and coach Gene Stallings is this year's guest speaker.

Last year's dinner drew about 600 — a wild success now approaching its fourth annual outing. "My thought was a glorified covered-dish dinner," event co-chair Mel Coxwell said chuckling, recalling the project's start. It quickly grew. In three years, the coalition donated just under \$75,000 to Habitat for a Rankin County build. That supplied the major funding for a Habitat house in Brandon, built and dedicated in 2015. Property has been acquired for a next one in Pelahatchie.

"If a Wild Game Dinner is not going to work



ELIJAH BAYLIS/THE CLARION-LEDGER

Fried duck, one of Ramsey Russell's favorite duck dishes. Russell will often tenderize duck breast, soaking it in milk overnight to get the flavor mild, then dip it in batter, fry it and serve with Jezebel Sauce.

in Rankin County, it's not going to work anywhere. That's part of it," said Coxwell, with good speakers, worthy cause, volunteers and community fellowship playing a big part, too. Hunting and fishing is big there. "I guess other than football, it would be the No. 1 thing."

Russell's GetDuck.com hunts specialize in Argentina and Mexico and have gone all over Canada plus the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Uruguay. A trip's planned for Pakistan this winter, plus more in its scope. "It's just unbelievable how big a world it is for duck hunting," said Russell, who operates the family business with his wife, Anita.

"Food is always a big, important part of it. When you go to these hunting lodges, everybody of course wants to sample the game." Breasting the duck and combining it with jalapeno peppers and cream cheese is a common treatment. But

grapes, cherries, water chestnuts and pineapple pop up other places.

"It's kind of the same thing but a different take on it," he said. "To me, good food is what you like." On the coast in Peru, he had chupa, a shrimp chowder with eggs poached in the broth. "Now every time I make chicken and dumplings or gumbo, I put eggs in it!"

Good camp cooks don't have recipe books. "Camp food is just what's on hand. 'I was gonna stuff it with something, but I had this on hand instead,' you know?"

And what comes around, goes around. "Ramsey's where I came up with the deer poppers," said fellow Rankin Countian and Wild Game Dinner volunteer Chuck Nolan.

Nolan cautioned that because of duck limits and hunters' love for eating their own, it's tough to get duck for sampling at the dinner, where deer, deer sau-

sage and hog tend to prevail.

But Russell's methods, simple and streamlined, can be used easily on other proteins. He likes combining duck with sweet and fruity flavors. Wrapped in bacon and stuffed with something interesting (water chestnuts, pineapple chunks and pickled ginger as options), then a couple of turns on the grill till done, "and hope you don't get distracted and be off on your timing."

Wild duck is leaner than farmed. "If everybody could go out and shoot something that tasted like Peking duck from Whole Foods, they'd be extinct. ... The flavor's in the fat," Russell said. The wild duck needs to be rare to medium rare; cooked too long, it can get a strong iron taste.

He'll also cook duck breast like he does filet mignon, searing it three minutes per side, then in the oven for three to four minutes at 450 degrees. To the bit of oil in the skillet after searing, he'll add jam, favoring fig preserves. This time, he tried raspberry-jalapeno jam and added a new weapon to his tasty camp arsenal.

Russell will also tenderize duck breast, soaking it in milk overnight to get the flavor mild. Then, dip it in batter and fry it, with Jezebel Sauce for dipping. A thick and hearty gumbo simmered nearby for a full-scale duck camp sampling.

The former forester left government service to "chase the dream," and his hunt-organizing side hobby became the family business. A delicious direction, by all accounts.

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