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ERIC RUTH FOUNDER, HICKORY CREEK FOOD TRUCK PARK

FROM EYESORE TO GATHERING PLACE

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Eric Ruth spent years asking two towns to make room for food trucks. Now he runs the park where six of them stay for good.

For a while, the lot at 8310 South Stemmons Freeway in Hickory Creek was the kind of place drivers stopped seeing. An IHOP had stood there. After it was torn down, the property sat abandoned and overgrown.

“It was just a mess,” Eric Ruth says. “It was an eyesore for the community.”

Ruth had his eye on it anyway. When the town’s Economic Development Corporation bought the property in the fall of 2025, crews came out to trim the big oak trees around it. Ruth took that as his cue.

“Well, it’s time for me to go to work and start cleaning,” he remembers thinking.

“I cleaned all the property myself,” he says. Today the lot is Hickory Creek Food Truck Park. It has seating, a play area for kids, vegetable gardens, flower gardens, and six food trucks that stay put. One of them is his. It’s a red 1982 truck that he bought on a handshake payment plan, then rebuilt in a Houston driveway from his own hand-drawn plans, and it has been feeding people for more than two decades.

The park opened in April 2026. Getting there took a lot longer than that.

> “ If you have a dream, I don’t care what it is, never let anyone discourage you. — Eric Ruth

6	21	4.7	2.6K
Food Trucks on Site	Years in the Lake Cities	Google Rating	Facebook Followers

A TRUCK ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

Ruth grew up in Hubbard, Texas, a small town an hour and a half to two hours south of the Dallas Metroplex. His love of food came from home. “The passion for food actually came from my mom and my aunts who were great cooks,” he says.

As a young man he was living in the Houston area. He and his sister, Demetrius, would drive up to Hubbard to visit their mother. On a couple of those trips they passed a truck sitting by the road with a for-sale sign on it. His sister kept telling him to stop and look at it.

“I don’t have money to purchase a food truck,” he told her.

It wasn’t really a food truck yet. The owner had been trying to turn it into one himself and had put in makeshift cabinets. One day, on the way in from Houston, Ruth finally stopped. The owner met him at the truck, which was parked in what Ruth remembers as a Walmart parking lot. Ruth’s first question was the price.

The man laughed. He told Ruth he hadn’t even driven it yet, so why not drive it first and talk about price after. It had a 350 engine with a four-barrel carburetor, he explained, so Ruth would have to pump the gas pedal to get fuel to the carburetor.

Ruth pumped it, it cranked right up, and he drove it around the lot. “I’m saying to myself, man, this thing is in good shape,” he says.

Back at the curb, the owner asked him to make an offer. The first number that came to Ruth’s mind was $1,500, and he didn’t have it. The man said he had about that much in the tires alone. Ruth came clean: he was going through some personal things, he didn’t have the money, but he liked the truck.

The man asked if he had a job. He did. So the owner made a deal. He would park the truck at his own house and let Ruth pay it off, $2,500 in all, and when it was paid, Ruth could come get the title.

He still tells people the same thing about it. “It was a blessing from God, because it wasn’t me,” Ruth says.



Eric Ruth with the truck he bought on a payment plan and rebuilt himself

BUILT IN A HOUSTON DRIVEWAY

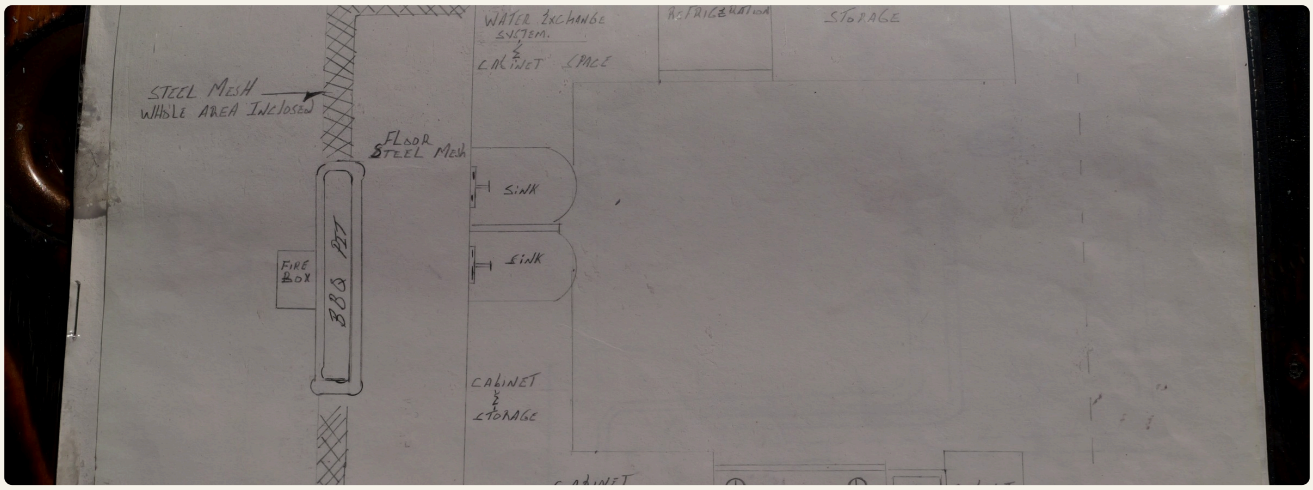
Once it was paid off, Ruth drove the old truck to Houston. “I must have been a crazy man. I was young and excited,” he says.

He parked it in his driveway and went to work. He doesn’t call himself a natural mechanic or carpenter. “I can see the vision. I’ll try to do anything once,” he says. Along the way a lot of people helped, some of whom he has since lost track of. His cousin in Hubbard built out the cabinets and helped him put in the water system.

Before any of that, Ruth had drawn the plans. He had taken some architecture classes in college, and he sketched the kitchen layout by hand: counters, sinks, cabinets, the works. The drawings are dated 2001. He still keeps them in a binder he has carried for decades. “It’s not to scale, keep in mind,” he says. “But I had this. It was in my head.”

The truck still runs on its original engine. Mechanics who have been through it tell him it’s in great shape. He has driven it between Houston and Dallas at least five times, but these days it stays on the property. “I won’t even go 25 miles out of the way in it,” he says.

> “ You see guys going to the window buying stuff ... but you don’t see what happens on the back end and the front end.



Eric’s hand-drawn 2001 plans for the truck’s kitchen

LEARNING TO DO LESS

Ruth says he can cook just about anything. Working the truck taught him that this is a problem, not a selling point.

“Once I started working the food truck, I found very quickly that you can do too much,” he says. So he streamlined to barbecue.

He has done festivals, private events and catering under the name E. Ruth’s Fine Catering. “You name it, I’ve done it,” he says. For most of those years, though, the truck ran only in spring and summer, and customers had to find him. They would ask when he’d be out again, and he would point them to social media.

Now, for the first time, he keeps regular days and hours. “Now I’ve got it now where people know my hours, know where I’m gonna be, and it’s a no-brainer,” he says.

That suits him. Plenty of food truck owners love the festival circuit, and some of the trucks at the park still work festivals. Ruth would rather stay put. “It’s more comfortable for me to actually have a set location where people can come to me,” he says.

HICKORY CREEK FOOD TRUCK PARK
Six food trucks. One family-friendly park.
Barbecue, Mediterranean, chicken & waffles, catfish, tacos and fried ribs.
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EIGHT YEARS FOR AN ORDINANCE

Ruth moved to Lake Dallas in 2005. He has lived in the Lake Cities area for about 21 years. When he arrived, Lake Dallas had no food truck ordinance. He was working Little League games, summer football and Fourth of July celebrations, and he started talking to the town about putting one in place.

It took about eight years of meetings and conversations. "So I guess you could call me a pioneer of food trucks," he says.

He later moved across the freeway to Hickory Creek, close enough to be a stone's throw away. Few people there knew him, so he started over. Council members and the mayor would come by when the neighborhood held events, and Ruth would tell them what he did and what he wanted to do. One conversation led to another, and Hickory Creek put a food truck ordinance in place too.

After that, he kept meeting with town leaders and telling them about his vision. He already had a property in mind: the old IHOP lot.

> "Most of the money that I've made throughout this venture has gone back into the business itself.



One of the park's six vendors, set up beside the picnic tables

TURNING THE LOT AROUND

The town had a different site in mind at first. Ruth met with a council member, the city manager and the Economic Development Corporation, which leads community projects in Hickory Creek. The site they suggested was a nice piece of land, but it was undeveloped. Getting it ready would have taken a lot of work and a lot of money.

Ruth kept bringing up the IHOP lot. He had tried on his own to reach the owner through the listing realtor, but the introduction never came through. After a few more meetings, the town came around. Maybe the other property wasn't ready yet, they told him, and they would look at his.

In August 2025, they came back to him. They had the ball rolling on the IHOP property. In September they told him they were closing at the end of the month, and they did. Then the trees were trimmed, and Ruth started cleaning.

The work isn't finished, and he says so. The park is in its first phase, with seating areas in place. "If things proceed and work out, we'd like to put a building there," he says, so that people are comfortable whether it's hot or cold.



The former IHOP lot today: covered seating, turf and gardens

E. RUTH'S CRAFT BBQ
Mesquite-smoked. Fed by hand.
Thursday & Friday 5–9 p.m. · Saturday 1–9 p.m. or until sold out.
Get directions
At Hickory Creek Food Truck Park

SIX TRUCKS, BY DESIGN

The park has six trucks, and Ruth's barbecue is one of them. The others serve Mediterranean food, chicken and waffles, catfish, tacos and fried ribs.

"Right now we are at capacity," he says.

That's on purpose. Ruth didn't want a park where a different set of trucks showed up every weekend. "I didn't want food trucks coming and going," he says. Part of his reasoning was for the town. At the end of the day the town has to bring in tax dollars to make the project worth its while, and Ruth pointed out early that a revolving cast of trucks would be hard to track.

So each truck signs a one-year contract. None of the current vendors have said they want to leave, even after a long, hot summer that kept crowds down. Ruth expects business to pick up now that the weather has cooled.

If a spot does open, he'll probably have to run a lottery to fill it. He already knows what he'd like to add: a hibachi truck. Vendors who want to get on the list can email him at hickorycreekfoodtruckpark@gmail.com.

> “ Once I started working the food truck, I found very quickly that you can do too much.

MESQUITE, FED BY HAND

Ruth calls himself old school. Growing up a native Texan, he was around old-timers who treated barbecue as the main event. Today, he says, barbecue has become so commercialized that you can buy almost any setup you want, including pellet grills that text your phone when the meat reaches temperature.

That isn’t how he cooks. He cuts his own wood. “I’m a mesquite guy. I grew up on mesquite,” he says. He makes his own rubs too.

He owns several smokers, and each has a story. In his backyard sits the first one, a square smoker with four shelves and an offset firebox, built more than 20 years ago by his cousin from steel Ruth bought at a fabrication shop in Houston. When Ruth moved, it took about five men and a set of casters to roll it, with someone behind it in case it tipped and knocked the fence down. “It would take a crane to get it out of the backyard,” he says.

There is also a rebuilt Oklahoma Joe. Those smokers tend to burn out their fire-boxes, and rather than throw two of them away, Ruth had a friend who welds join the two chambers and fabricate a new firebox out of a propane bottle.

The smoker that does the work at the park came from Facebook Marketplace. Ruth was scrolling one Sunday when he spotted it and decided to go take a look. It has six racks that rotate electrically, but the heat still comes from wood that he feeds by hand.

“That is the art of cooking, personally: it’s maintaining the heat,” he says. “Every-thing that I do is manual.”

He bought it in October 2025. “I financially didn’t want to make the investment, but hey, it’s already paid for itself,” he says. Every smoked meat on his menu comes out of it. “Without that smoker that I have on property now, I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing.”



The wood-fed rotating smoker behind every plate of Eric's barbecue

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WHAT YOU DON'T SEE AT THE WINDOW

People often tell Ruth they're thinking about getting a food truck or a trailer. He tells them to look past the line at the window.

"You see guys going to the window buying stuff ... but you don't see what happens on the back end and the front end," he says. There's the preparing and getting ready for the day, keeping every item at the right temperature, and staying in compliance with the health department.

"A lot of people think you jump out of here and just start making money off the top," he says. That hasn't been his experience. "Most of the money that I've made throughout this venture has gone back into the business itself."

He still believes in starting, though. People still ask him how he's going to do something, or why he would bother. "If you have a dream, I don't care what it is, never let anyone discourage you," he says.

THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

The truck isn't Ruth's only business. He also runs an education consulting company that sells curriculum and assessments to school districts across Texas and Oklahoma. "I'm often asked why don't I open five days a week with the food truck," he says. That's the reason.

The barbecue truck is open Thursdays and Fridays from 5 to 9 p.m., and Saturdays from 1 to 9 p.m. or until he sells out.

The park itself was built around one idea. "The vision that I laid out was a family friendly environment where families could come out, sit and eat," he says. There is a play area for children, and the property is pet friendly. Customers are coming from other towns and cities, Ruth says, and older residents love coming out for a good meal.

He has watched opinions about food trucks change over his years on the road. "There was a time when people really frowned on food trucks," he says. Now customers know they're getting a good-quality product rather than food that started out frozen.

"The community has really accepted it very well," he says. He would like to meet the rest of it. Come out, he says. He looks forward to meeting you in person, and maybe having a few conversations.

ABOUT ERIC RUTH

Eric Ruth is the founder of Hickory Creek Food Truck Park and the owner of E. Ruth's Fine Catering, the barbecue truck he built from his own hand-drawn plans. He has lived in the Lake Cities for about 21 years and helped bring food truck ordinances to Lake Dallas and Hickory Creek.

Visit Hickory Creek Food Truck Park at 8310 S. Stemmons Fwy, Hickory Creek. E. Ruth's Craft BBQ is open Thursday and Friday 5–9 p.m. and Saturday 1–9 p.m. Catering: (972) 322-4930. Vendor inquiries: hickorycreekfoodtruckpark@gmail.com

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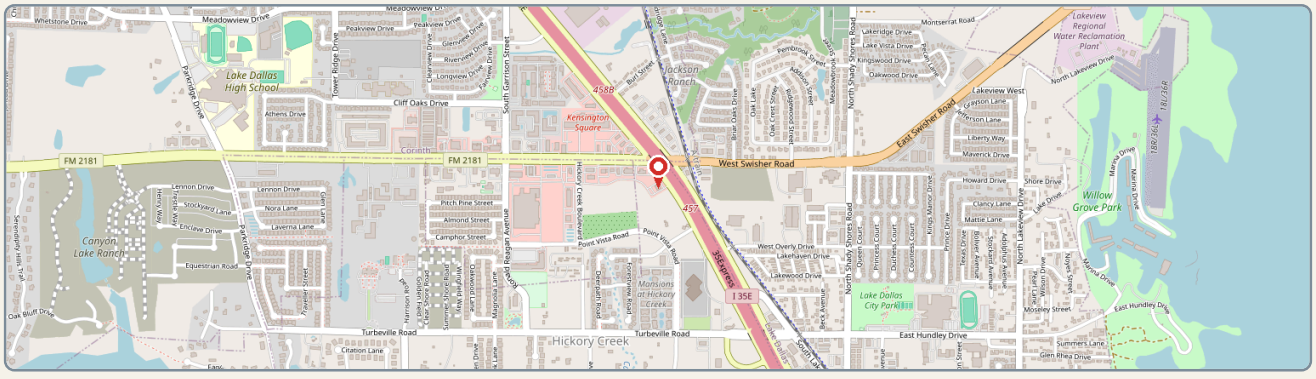

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