

# Bracewell brings legacy of family business to co-op's Board

By Melissa Segrest

**T**exas barbecue pro and civic leader Bryan Bracewell is the newest member of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board of Directors. He joined the board in May as one of the District 3, Bastrop County, directors, replacing James Kershaw, who retired after 36 years of service.

Bracewell brings a legacy of his own to the position. He is the third generation of Bracewells to own Southside Market & Barbeque, a business founded in downtown Elgin in 1882 and renowned as the birthplace of Elgin hot sausage. His grandfather, Ernest Bracewell, bought the business in 1968 and relocated it to what is now U.S. 290. That original hot sausage is still on the menu.

A 350-seat Southside location opened in Bastrop on Texas 71 in 2014, and a new Hutto location is expected to open in the spring of 2019, Bryan Bracewell said. Southside distributes sausage to all major grocers in the Austin area, to H-E-Bs in Central and North Texas, and to Walmart, which sells the sausage in Texas and four other states. Bracewell started working at Southside at age 12, like his father, Ernest Bracewell, Jr.

Bryan Bracewell grew up in Elgin. After graduating from Texas A&M University in 1998 with a degree in food science and technology, he returned to work alongside his grandfather and father until 2010, when he took the reins of the business. "I had a strong desire to grow the business and keep us on that growth path," he said. Today, Southside has more than 140 employees.

Bracewell's business philosophies are straightforward. "We aspire to be servant leaders. Our mission is to enrich the lives of the people we encounter daily. Sausage and barbecue are the details of what we do, but at the end of the day, it's really all about people. We add value by serving others.... People do business with people, not with places."

He is active in Elgin and Bastrop commu-



**Bryan Bracewell joined Bluebonnet's Board of Directors in May to represent District 3, Bastrop County. He is the third-generation owner of Southside Market & Barbeque. Behind him is the Elgin Chamber of Commerce building. Sarah Beal photo**

nity organizations. He is on the Elgin Chamber of Commerce's board of directors and executive committee, and he has twice been the chamber's chairman. Bracewell is on the boards of the Elgin Economic Development Corporation, the Bastrop Central Appraisal District and the Bastrop-based nonprofit, Feed the Need Missions. He also serves on the First National Bank of Bastrop's Elgin Community Advisory Board and served on the Central Texas Food Bank's board of directors.

Bluebonnet has experienced rapid growth on the western side of the service area, and Bracewell sees growth pushing into Elgin. That growth presents the city with opportunities and challenges. "Other communities in our service area have gone through it. It's Elgin's turn," he said. "As Austin grows and prices itself out of the range of a lot of families, then Elgin is an attractive option."

Elgin's downtown has flourished in the last few years, and that helps preserve the city's culture and history. "If we embrace growth and do it in a proper way, Elgin can

grow in an intentional and productive manner," Bracewell said.

Joining the Bluebonnet Electric board is an honor, Bracewell said. "I'm looking forward to the challenge of learning the business of Bluebonnet and the industry. Bluebonnet is held in such high esteem in its service area," he said. "It's a privilege to be selected for the board. It's also humbling and intimidating. It's a big job. I don't take that lightly."

Bracewell and his wife, Rachel, who is a part of the marketing team at Southside were high school sweethearts. They married in 1998, and live in downtown Bastrop. They have twin sons, Chase and Nathan.

When Bracewell isn't at work or taking on a community project, he and Rachel are involved in their sons' sports activities. But when there's a chance to get away, they opt for the outdoors: camping, hunting, fishing and hiking.

And, just like their father and grandfather, his sons work at Southside today at age 12. "They clean tables and wash dishes, just like I did," Bracewell said. □