



For two Texans with a 25-year friendship, a passion for food and the collective experience to make it work, opening a barbeque restaurant in the desert seemed like a natural idea. Willard Sterling and Steve Vinson thought so, and the palate pleasing result was Tootie's Texas Barbeque which opened in Cathedral City in 2002 featuring the authentic taste of the famous Texas culinary tradition. The guys had gone back to their roots.

Sterling, a graduate of the CCA, has been in the restaurant industry since college. From front of the house to Executive Chef in San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and New York City. Sterling has been the featured Chef at the James Beard House in New York on three occasions. With all of his formal education, the art of smoking meats was actually learned from his father, whose nickname is Tootie, hence, the name of the restaurant. Even with the best smoking techniques, Sterling admits, it's the sauce that makes it real Texas barbeque. Over the years, Sterling Sr. and Jr. have perfected a tangy sauce and a companion sauce called "Kick Ass!" (chipotle puree enhanced) that's a bit spicier for the more daring barbeque lovers. The philosophy here is to use the sauce as a "gravy", not a thick and heavy concoction that masks the delicate smokiness of the meats. Both sauces complement every kind of barbequed meat and the recipes are a closely held secret.

A microbiologist by education, Vinson seems an unlikely restaurant owner, but his interest in pastry making led him to train professionally and contribution to Tootie's is tasted in every piece of pie and cobbler. Using his business background, Vinson also serves as the general manager of this venture.



True Texans, the owners of Tootie's feature the famous native brew—Shiner Bock—a smooth amber beer popular with residents of the Lone Star State, and now introduced on tap to Tootie's customers. Other traditional or "domestic" longnecks can be found on ice near the service counter along with freshly squeezed lemonade.

The response to their efforts was awarded to them "Best Barbeque in the Valley" 2002, 2003, and 2004". Tootie's Texas Barbeque was included in the July 2004 feature article in Sunset Magazine, "Best Barbeque in the West".



***In 2009 Tooties Texas Barbeque was sold to Larry Babitz.***