



Pat and Gina Neely with a favorite grill

# Behind the Scenes With the Neelys

The Food Network's *Down Home with the Neelys* shoots at the family's own house.

BY JENNIFER DOME

When the cameras begin to shoot *Down Home with the Neelys*, the Food Network's top-rated Saturday morning show, the stars don't change gears. In fact, their charm is natural, on and off the set. We watched Pat and Gina film at their own home just outside of Memphis. Here's what goes on when you're literally down home with the Neelys.

## Before the Cameras Roll

From bright lights hanging from the kitchen ceiling, cameras and computers in the dining area, and hair and make-up in the living room, showbiz takes over. Metal tables in the three-car garage hold kitchen equipment, the right tools to create the day's dish: Nana's Chicken Seafood Gumbo. As a group of Food Network stylists prepare the first shot, Pat and Gina review the recipe, step by step. Then

Gina turns on a YouTube video of Tina Turner and Beyoncé and breaks into her own dance. "I want people to enjoy what we do and take away from it," Gina says. "We're showing a positive family and that cooking together can be fun."

## The Taping

It's clear that the unscripted exchanges between Pat and Gina are the result of their easy relationship. "She's my personal partner, my co-host on the show, and my business partner," Pat says about his wife of 15 years. "To do this with the love of your life is the best thing."

The couple tells on-camera stories of their childhoods and the way cooking created a village-type atmosphere with friends and relatives preparing meals together. When Shelbi, their youngest daughter, returns home from school, the cameras take a break. "Our show is much more than a cooking show," says Pat. "It's about family and family relationships. Cooking in the kitchen has made our marriage so much stronger."

## Wrap-up

After the kid-break, the crew shoots an outdoor grilling episode with an energetic Pat while staffers stash props in the garage for tomorrow's episode. By early evening, the busy studio becomes a family home again. Will the Neelys cook dinner now? Not tonight. "After a long day of cooking on camera," says Gina with a grin, "we're ordering in." \*

## Where It All Began

The show is inspired by Neely's Bar-B-Que, which Pat and his brothers opened in 1988 (Memphis and Nashville). Paula Deen's sons and producer helped in the move to TV. Order Pat and Gina's cookbook, *Down Home with the Neelys: A Southern Family Cookbook* (Alfred A. Knopf, \$27.95), at [neelysbbq.com](http://neelysbbq.com).