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## Mini-profile - Nick Lampros '84, spicing up a legal career

It's not every day that you meet a corporate attorney who sidelines as a salsa purveyor. But Nick Lampros, a Virginia lawyer who co-owns Gunther's Gourmet, a line of marinades and salsas, wears the dual hats well.

After graduating from Duke in 1984 with a major in political science, Lampros received his law degree from Vanderbilt University. He started his legal career at a large corporate law firm in Roanoke, Virginia, but soon realized big-firm life wasn't right for him. He quit, and after a brief interlude involving extensive overseas travel and a stint running a friend's restaurant, he started his own law practice, specializing in estate planning.

Lampros is modest, even self-deprecating, about his work as a lawyer. Asked to describe a typical workday at his firm, he wryly replies: "I make paper and shift it from one side of the desk to another and occasionally mail it out."

Yet his voice lifts with enthusiasm when the subject turns to food. He describes cooking as a passion that runs deep in his blood. His grandfather, a Greek immigrant, owned Nick's Place, a diner where Lampros' father and uncles worked on nights and weekends. When they were old enough, Lampros and his brother, Mike, followed suit.

As it happens, Lampros' legal training is what ultimately made Gunther's Gourmet a reality. In 1999, Mike, a corporate chef, came to Nick about a recipe for a marinade that he planned to enter in a national contest. When Lampros read the fine print, he realized his brother's recipe would become the property of the sponsor. Instead of losing the rights to the recipe, Lampros suggested that they copyright, bottle, and sell the marinade themselves.

In no time, his brother was cooking up 100-gallon batches of his orange-balsamic vinaigrette marinade while Lampros went about incorporating Gunther's Gourmet Grocery LLC, named after Mike's dog. Their early distribution method amounted to Mike's selling marinade to small local grocers from the back of his jeep.

Gunther's is now in its eighth year, and its products can be found in approximately 300 stores in twenty-one states, including the upscale grocer Fresh Market. The line has expanded beyond Mike's original marinade to include a roasted-garlic and sun-dried-tomato vinaigrette/marinade, and one made with lemon and oregano that is a nod to flavors prevalent in Greek cuisine.

The company also sells seven salsas, in flavors such as Lime Mango, Black and White Bean, and Crab, a bestseller that uses Chesapeake Bay blue-crab claw meat. The brothers are developing new products, too, such as a chocolate dessert "salsa" and grilling rubs.

Gunther's prides itself on being health conscious, using only all-natural ingredients that contain no additives or preservatives and are low in sodium. Their target customer "knows food and enjoys the overall food experience. More than just nourishment, our customers are interested in the textures and flavors of food," says Lampros. And in honor of its namesake, a nine-year-old boxer, the company also donates a portion of the profits to a charity in Richmond that works to prevent cruelty to animals.

With business booming—sales are up over 50 percent from last year—Lampros' days are spent juggling legal work for his clients and salsa deals for Gunther's. But he says the dual career is fulfilling.

"Intellectually, the legal field is fine," he explains. But his work for Gunther's is what allows him to feel as if he is "creating something, rather than fixing something or tearing it apart," he says.

"I have to say it's been a great bit of fun."

— Malina Brown

Brown's work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The News & Observer*, among other publications.

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