



A TASTE OF gourmet

Gunther's Gourmet Groceries is earning quite a reputation for its salsas and marinades.



FRONT BURNER
Lindsey Nair
 lindsey.nair@roanoke.com
 981-3343

MORE INSIDE

Recipes for Seafaring Bloody Marys and Peach & Honey Glazed Pork Chops.
Page 3

The day before Thanksgiving, a travel piece about downtown Roanoke appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

Tucked among sentences about the "Christmas tree sweater-set crowd" at Mill Mountain Coffee and the sleek new art museum was a comment about Chocolatepaper that caught my eye:

"... don't leave without grabbing a few jars of salsas from Gunther's Gourmet, a small family-owned business in Richmond."

Well, the business may be based in Richmond, but the brains — and taste buds — behind it belong to two Roanoke natives, Mike and Nick Lampros. And these days, a mention in a big city newspaper

isn't all that surprising, because Gunther's Gourmet Groceries is earning quite a reputation.

Just four years ago, my predecessor, Beth Macy, wrote a story about the company, which was named for Mike's late boxer, Gunther. At that time, Mike and his family members were doing all of the deliveries themselves.

These days, the company has a new boxer mascot named Ludwig von Gunther and a new office building in Richmond, complete with a loading dock and a room for all of the awards.

When I say "all," I mean more than 40 awards from such high-profile food competitions



Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times
 Roanoke natives Mike (left) and Nick Lampros have created a line of successful gourmet salsas (top) and marinades.

See NAIR, 3

NAIR: 'We don't want to get too big too fast'

FROM 1

as the Scovies, the Hot Pepper Awards, ZestFest and the Fiery Food Challenge.

"We are winning year after year all over the country," Mike Lampros said.

In the past year alone, Gunther's products have won 25 national awards, including 14 at the Hot Pepper Awards in New York and one at the Scovies in New Mexico.

"It's officially been 10 years since the company got started," Mike Lampros told me. "We are doing some [single] sales now that are bigger than our entire first year."

The brothers Lampros

In mid-November, Nick and Mike Lampros set up a Gunther's Gourmet booth at the Stocked Market in Roanoke. They'd done food shows before, but at this show they were more than vendors, they were hometown boys done good.

I watched with amusement as one person after another stopped to greet the "boys," now in their 40s.

"I know your mother and father!" cried one woman, squeezing into the tiny booth to throw her arms around Nick. "I am so proud of you!"

Their father, Leo Lampros, practiced orthodontia in Roanoke for years. He and his wife, Barbara, raised three children who all graduated from North Cross School. Daughter Penny has taken over her father's practice.

At the show, the retired doctor was put to work assembling boxes for his sons.

"It's fun to do this because I get a lot of interaction," Nick Lampros said at the show. "I mean, I sit behind my desk shuffling paper all day."

Nick still lives in the area with his wife, Linda, and their four children, who are all under the age of 7. He is a lawyer at Martin, Hopkins & Lemon specializing in estate planning and corporate law.

When Mike Lampros, who has a degree from the Culinary Institute of America and lives in Richmond,



In mid-November, Nick and Mike Lampros set up a Gunther's Gourmet booth at the Stocked Market in Roanoke.

created his first product 10 years ago, it seemed only natural for his brother to handle the legal side.

"I get to be the bad guy," Nick Lampros joked, "which I do every day."

All natural

Mike Lampros gets to be the creative guy. He was driving along one day thinking about the peri-peri pepper, also known as the African birdseye, which is a popular pepper right now.

"I just started rhyming things in my head," he said. "Peri-peri lingenberry? But lingenberry is not going to be good in salsa, so what else can I do?"

That was the impetus for Fiery Peri-Peri Dark Cherry, which debuted in May along with Jalapeno Salsa Fresca, Fiery Cranberry Habanero and Spicy Ginger Pineapple.

That "hot line" of salsas joined three Gunther's marinades and seven other salsas already on the market, including the popular Black and White Bean Salsa and Chesapeake Bay Crab Salsa, which

contains blue crab claw meat. "Once you pour them all out, they look completely different," Mike Lampros said.

He prides himself on that fact, because it shows each of his recipes is unique.

"We do not take our regular salsa and just add peaches," he said.

Mike said he perfects each recipe using natural ingredients, and you'll find that jars of Gunther's Gourmet salsa and marinades don't list any unrecognizable contents — not even the ubiquitous high fructose corn syrup.

You'll also notice that even the spiciest Gunther's product has a nice, creeping heat that stops short of burning the tongue, because the Lampros brothers believe flavor trumps pain.

Gunther's Gourmet salsas taste freshly made right out of the jar, and that's one reason Mike and Nick aren't in a hurry to mass-produce their products.

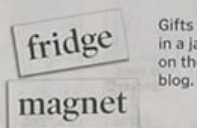
"If we get investors, I'm scared they'll say, 'Great product. Here's what we are going to do: We're

going to take out some of the mango puree and add white vinegar and thicken it a little,'" Mike Lampros said.

He is happy to protect the integrity of his creations by having them bottled at a small packaging facility in Maryland and sold at smaller chains and independent gourmet stores. And while the brothers would like to see continued growth on a gradual scale, Nick Lampros says that in today's economy, the company is doing well if it isn't shrinking.

"We don't want to get too big too fast," Mike Lampros agreed. "We want to take care of A, then move to B and take care of B, then move to C."

"We are growing on our terms."



Seafaring Bloody Marys

Makes two cocktails

- 4 oz. Gunther's Gourmet Chesapeake Bay Crab Salsa
- 2 shots good vodka
- 8 oz. tomato juice
- 2 stalks celery
- 2 lemon wedges dipped in Old Bay seasoning
- Ice

1. Divide the vodka, tomato juice and crab salsa into two 8 oz. tumblers.
2. Mix well and top with ice.
3. Garnish with celery stalks and lemon wedges.

Peach & Honey Glazed Pork Chops

Serves 2

- 2 pork chops (about 8 oz. each)
- 4 oz. Gunther's Peach Salsa
- 1 Tbsp. honey
- Kosher or sea salt to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil

1. Drain Gunther's Peach Salsa through a fine strainer. Keep both the juice and the chunky salsa.
2. Mix the juice with the honey and set aside.
3. Season both pork chops with salt and pepper and then lightly coat both with the olive oil.
4. Turn your grill on high and close the lid until it is about 450 degrees.
5. Grill pork chops for 6 to 10 minutes on each side, brushing with the honey mixture every few minutes. Once the pork chops have reached an internal temperature of 150 to 155 degrees, remove from grill and let sit for 4-6 minutes.
6. Serve each chop with a dollop of the drained chunky salsa. Serve with your favorite sides.

Source: www.gunthersgourmet.com

About Gunther's Gourmet Groceries

Marinades and vinaigrettes: Orange Balsamic, Roasted Garlic & Sundried Tomato, Lemon Oregano

Salsas: Fiery Peri-Peri Dark Cherry, Jalapeno Salsa Fresca, Spicy Ginger Pineapple, Fiery Cranberry Habanero, Black & White Bean, Chesapeake Bay Crab, Spicy Chipotle Pepper & Smoked Corn, Peach, Lime Mango, Salsa Fresca and Tomatillo Salsa Verde

Where to buy: Roanoke: Chocolatepaper, Roanoke Natural Foods Co-op, Tinnell's Finer Foods; **Salem:** Countryside Classics; **Blacksburg:** Gourmet Pantry; **Daleville:** Ikenberry Orchards; **Lexington:** Healthy Foods Market, Virginia Born & Bred; **Buena Vista:** Uncorked; **Warm Springs:** Milk House Market

Price: Depends on the store. Salsas range from \$3.99-\$7.99 per jar and marinades range from \$4.25-\$5.99

Sample: Gunther's Gourmet will be at The Greater Roanoke Home & Garden Show at the Roanoke Civic Center Jan. 8-10.

Learn more: www.gunthersgourmet.com