

Oroville's Own: Two hometown men aim to take local sauce to national heights

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J Lee Roy's Dippin' Sauce is to Oroville what apple pie is to America, but a couple of hometown boys are aiming to change all that by expanding the sauce's distribution to markets throughout the nation. "Our ultimate goal is to have J Lee Roy's in refrigerators all across the country just like ketchup," said Spiro Theveos, who along with Brian Addington, now own the dippin' sauce manufacturing and full-service catering company. Both Oroville natives say they



grew up on J Lee Roy's Dippin' sauce and lived close enough to the home-based cooking facility of its creator, Roy Mastelotto and his wife Lillian, to run over when they were kids and pick up a jar whenever their families were barbecuing. "We grew up here and J Lee Roy's was always around. Neither of us can imagine a barbecue without dippin' sauce. A bottle of it was just always in the refrigerator," said Addington. "When we went away to college and to pursue careers and we got homesick, our families would send us care packages and they always included dippin' sauce." Addington, a 1994 Oroville High graduate, left Oroville to attend Woodbury University in Burbank, and Theveos, a 1995 OHS graduate, left to attend Sacramento State University. Addington, now an investment adviser with Bank of America in San Francisco, and Theveos, an office technician with Ray Morgan Co. in Chico and living in Lincoln, purchased J Lee Roy's in May. The purchase was only completed, said Addington, after he and Theveos spent two months talking to Mastelotto. "He wanted to make sure that if the product had his name on it, that it was going to continue to have the same great quality," said Addington. "We respected that and so it was OK with us to wait until Roy was willing to take us under his wing, sell us the business and then mentor us." During their first six months in business, the partners took their barbecue show on the road, cooking at 30 different events including VIP tailgate parties for Cal Berkeley games, fairs, charity events and barbecue cookoffs from Southern California to Nevada and to the Oregon border to spread the word and the taste of dippin' sauce to as many folks as possible. They also took their products to specialty grocery stores and delis. "We're just so excited because we know if we can get it in people's mouths, they love it and the more mouths the more demand," said Addington. "We have a huge sense of pride not only about our product but also about the town it comes from. We love bragging about how awesome Oroville is, about making the dippin' sauce here, about coming from here about how cool it is here. So when we go out to sell the sauce, we are also selling Oroville." J Lee Roy's Dippin' Sauce wasn't completely unknown outside of Oroville when the pair purchased the company. The Mastelottos had done a great deal of work establishing the product during their ownership. The original J Lee Roy's had won both the "Best in the West" and "People's Choice" awards at the world's largest rib cookoff in Sparks, Nev., some years ago so was well-known in the barbecuing industry, said Addington. And all three flavors — original, hot and seafood blend — were carried in some specialty markets including Wagon Wheel and by Raley's supermarkets but, the "new dippin' sauce guys" went to work to expand those markets. "There were 75 Raley's stores that continually ordered the sauce and by the end of this summer there are 117. We were featured in Raley's Something Extra magazine this summer and we're going to be a

feature piece in the magazine again in January," said Addington, who splits his time between San Francisco and Oroville. "A dozen Food Maxx stores carried Roy's and now there are 45. We also added eight Food For Less but our biggest challenge became distribution. All the stores we've taken the sauce to loved it and wanted to carry it but how were we — both Spiro and I have full time jobs — going to get it to them?" The answer came recently when the partners approached Tony's Fine Foods, a Sacramento-based company that specializes in perishable food distribution throughout the western United States. The distribution company, with its 60 sales representatives and 3,000 grocery market and deli customers, added the dippin' sauce to its line of products. "Pretty much overnight, we had a whole new team of 60 sales people out there actively marketing and promoting our product," said Addington. "We've had to increase production and add another space to our manufacturing facility." The team at J Lee Roy's is small but mighty and includes the two partners, Addington's dad, John, cousins, brother and sister, Max and Sadie Garrick and Theveos' dad, Sam. The only non-family team member at Roy's is Celina Paiagua, officially the office manager but heralded by the owners as "the woman who holds it all together." In addition to the store sales, J Lee Roy's is also sold through phone orders and the company's Web site — www.jleeroys.com — scheduled to be re-launched after the first of the year to customers all across the nation. The company's full-service catering business may also be booked for events for 100 to 3,000 people by phone. "Our short term-goal is to make the sauce available across the West Coast, which is very achievable, and to increase our catering business," said Addington. "Our long-term goal is to take the product nationwide and expand the business so much that we'll be one of the largest employers in town. We're excited about it because we know that's achievable too."

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