

Lithia Man Has A Taste For BBQ Sauce

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Growing up in Greenville, N.C., George Foley remembers hitting some of the most venerated, noted barbecue joints in the southern United States.

Along with his father and mother and two brothers, Foley would hit Parker's Barbecue Restaurant and Respass

Brothers, developing a keen sense of what made eastern North Carolina's vinegar-based barbecue sauces distinct.

Now 50 and having lived in Lithia since 1998, Foley has decided to turn the knowledge gleaned over many meals into his own venture, putting a local spin on his own brand of barbecue sauce.

From headquarters in his home on five acres off Lithia-Pinecrest Road, Foley is now distributing "Carolina Sunshine Bar-B-Que Sauce," an eastern-North Carolina style sauce based on his own recipe.

The corporate director for risk and insurance for University Community Health in Tampa, Foley doesn't expect his sauce to put him in the position to retire anytime soon. But, he does expect to convert barbecue lovers from around Florida to what he considers a unique taste based on time-tested flavoring.

Foley said he knows of only two or three barbecue "joints" on Florida's west coast which serves eastern North Carolina sauces. He said he wants to turn the "backyard barbecuer" onto a different taste.

"There's a lot of chest-pounding about barbecue, but with all of them, there are only seven basic spices you can use," he said. "Mine is vinegar-based; that's different from what people around here think about barbecue sauce."

Carolina Sunshine comes in two styles: a mild, eastern

North Carolina taste and a hotter, spicier version. Foley -- who lives with his wife, Sharon, a Bevis Elementary School teacher and has two sons and a daughter -- said the idea to start his own barbecue sauce business developed from the backyard "pig pickins'" barbecues he throws for friends and family.

"I had been making my own recipe for about 10 years. People would regularly tell me, 'You should bottle this,'" said Foley, who holds a marketing degree from Arkansas State University. "I laughed at first. Finally, last year, I said, 'You know what? I'm going to do it.'"

Through a friend, Foley found a bottler in Lakeland who would cook, label and bottle Carolina Sunshine. At the beginning of December, Hot Wachulas, Inc., owner Matt Barber stirred up the first batches of Carolina Sunshine sauces, bottling 1,200 bottles per run for the next three months.

"He's doing really well and he's already talked to me about placing another order,"



George Foley holds up a mild bottle of Carolina Sunshine Bar-B-Que Sauce, left, and a bottle of the hotter version, right.

said Barber, who has about 12 clients bottling everything from sauces to salad dressings.

In addition, Foley also produces Carolina Sunshine "Rib n' Butt Rub," a \$4 bottle with mixed spices used on butt roasts.

"If someone sees my sign at a show and feels the need to ask me, 'What's a butt rub?' Then, they won't likely be leaving without one," he said, with a smile.

From Lakeland, the boxed

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Photo by PAUL CATALA

Carolina Sunshine developer and distributor George Foley sorts through a recent shipment of the sauces from Lakeland.

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bottles go to the home warehouse to be shipped to local stores and sold online over the Internet for \$4.95 a bottle. Some of the stores which have it on the shelves include the Green Egg in FishHawk, Roberts Meats in South Tampa and the delicatessen in University Community Hospital. In addition, he sells them at craft shows and weekend markets, like the arts and craft show held in FishHawk Ranch earlier this week.

So far, Foley said feedback has been positive on his venture.

Rodney Morgan, an attorney working for a Tampa hospital, said along with a partner he recently bought a case of sauces and butt rubs.

"It's amazingly good," said Morgan, who used the sauce and rubs for his Thanksgiving pork. "I hope he can make a go at it. We're very pleased."

Foley will be barbecuing and selling his Carolina Sunshine sauces at the Lakeland Pig Fest Jan. 30 to 31.

For information, see carolinasunshinebbq.com.