



FINDING SUCCESS WITH HOMEMADE, HOMEGROWN GHOST PEPPER SAUCE

By PHILLIP WEYHE

THIS ARTICLE ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE NORTHFIELD NEWS.

Trudi Lloyd is delivering some sweet heat to people in Northfield and the area.

Lloyd started jarring a ghost pepper sauce back in 2012 at the behest of coworkers. Seven years later, she's producing and creating, with the help of her husband Tom Hinman, more than 1,000 jars of the sauce annually. She is licensed to sell the product commercially now and does so in the Northfield and Rochester co-ops.

The name on the label: Treats By T.

"I like to cook and bake, and with the kids being gone, you have so much extra, so I would bring them to work," Lloyd said. "And they'd say 'Oh, T brought treats.' So that's where the name came from."

Lloyd, born in Faribault and raised in Farmington, moved to Northfield to work at Sheldahl in 1986. She left a couple years later to start work as a flight attendant at United Airlines, which she has done the last 30 years.

She raised two sons in Northfield – Nathan and Jake. Once they were out of the house, she had some free time on her hands. She had always enjoyed cooking and baking.

"I've just done that from such a young age. I was in Girl Scouts and my first badge ever was the cooking badge," Lloyd said. "My mom taught me how to cook, and I learned a lot from my grandma. I always loved it."

One day, after experimenting with her own version of a ghost pepper jelly, she brought it to her workplace in Chicago and shared with another flight attendant. They said it was really good and asked to buy some. Lloyd said she didn't have anything to sell, and her co-worker responded, "put me on your list."

Around the same time, in 2012, Lloyd was starting a relationship with Hinman, who she had met on Match.com. The two bonded over their time in the kitchen together.

"That was one of the things we always did together. In 2012, she said you have to try this, and it was her last jar (of the ghost pepper jelly), and she said 'You can't have anymore; that's the last of it,'" Hinman said. "That's when I knew she had something good."

The couple decided to buy ghost peppers in bulk to make dozens of jars at once, so Lloyd could try selling at a five-day Christmas bazaar. She brought 70 jars and sold out in one day.

"That really got it started," Hinman said.

Lloyd continued making and selling the sauce and eventually made new contacts; one led her to the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute. There, she was able to receive some grant money and start-up help, including manufacturing licenses and nutritional facts for the label.

As demand and opportunity grew, Lloyd and Hinman realized they couldn't rely on the local grocery stores for their pepper supply and instead took to growing their own ghost peppers. Now, each summer, they manage to grow hundreds of their main ingredient, plus a number of other vegetables and fruits, allowing for great quantities of their product: 1,300 jars in 2018.

In 2017, after visiting a trade show in Rochester, Lloyd made new contacts and was able to get her sauce into Northfield's Just Food Co-op and Rochester's People's Food Co-op. They joined the Riverwalk Market Fair in Northfield last year, finding success there, too. And



ABOVE: Trudi Lloyd and Tom Hinman, a married couple in Northfield, create and distribute a homemade, homegrown ghost pepper sauce, pictured bottom right. Lloyd developed the recipe and started the business, Treats By T; Hinman is her No. 1 supporter and helper. (Philip Weyhe/Northfield News)

PREVIOUS PAGE: Trudi Lloyd and Tom Hinman grow ghost peppers in their Northfield backyard to create the Treats By T ghost pepper sauce. (Photo courtesy of Treats by T)

the sauce can often be found at local establishments, like Keepsake Cidery, Tanzenwald Brewing, Fielder's Choice and Smoqhouse.

Throughout the years, Lloyd has developed some other products for smaller scale distribution. With the help of spent grain from Imminent Brewing, she developed doggie treats made from pumpkin, almond butter and other natural ingredients.

The business, Lloyd and Hinman say, is profitable, but the two aren't looking for any major expansions. They intend to grow at their own pace and won't be adding any employees.

"I don't really want it to be a big thing," Lloyd said. "We're just enjoying doing this together."

Philip Weyhe is the Editor of the St. Peter Herald, Waseca County News, Le Sueur County News, and Southern Minn Scene Magazine.



LOOKING FOR
fabulous?



Vision

DISTINCTIVE
EYEWEAR &
ACCESSORIES

425 Division Street South
Northfield, MN 55057
507-366-2020
visionofnorthfield.com