

# A spiedie sauce for all seasons

## Salamida eyes larger market

By LORI DEMO

It started on the pool table in the recreation room of Robert A. Salamida's home.

But next week, Salamida's State Fair Spiedie Sauce will arrive in Charlotte, W.Va., where it will be distributed formally outside of the state for the first time since he introduced it four years ago.

The 28-year-old Endwell native's association with spiedies, chunks of meat barbecued on a skewers, goes back to his high school days when he sold them outside such local taverns as Kelly's Bar & Grill in Endicott. He worked his way through college doing the same thing. And for many years, he has sold spiedies, a Broome County speciality, at the New York State Fair.

After being graduated from Bryant College in Smithville, R.I., in 1974, and after eight months of an unfulfilling job with Proctor & Gamble Co., Salamida returned to Endwell in 1975. He decided to market spiedie sauce, the marinade that gives spiedies their particular taste.

For a year, he worked at Satico's Luggage & Gift in Endicott during the day, spending his evenings and lunch hours on his new project. It took weeks to perfect his recipe and to learn how to produce and bottle the sauce, a process he and his lone employee do manually by filling the bottles with the oil, vinegar and spices.

Then he slowly started marketing it to local grocers, this year getting into the 88-store Victory Markets Inc. chain.

But by word of mouth, through former residents who have moved and visitors to the area, he says, demand for his sauce has increased. He frequently receives letters from people across the country asking for the sauce.

Now, he is expanding. He has added a second product, Salamida's State Fair Chicken Barbeque Sauce, a mixture of egg, vinegar and oil, that is based on an old college recipe and is a response to his observation that some people use his spiedie sauce for chicken.

And he just completed packaging for a Spiedie Survival Kit, selling for about \$8 and consisting of spiedie sauce and spiedie irons to be sent as a gift to those unfortunates in areas that do not have spiedies.

**Q. You have started your promotions now to parts outside of New York state. When did you actually decide to start marketing the spiedie sauce?**

**A.** It happened in 1975 at the State Fair. It was total desolation up there. We had a huge storm. The wind and the rain — everything was coming sideways at us. The mud was immense. It was terrible. I was really disillusioned. It was only the first or second day of the fair and I just wanted to pack up and go home. I had maybe \$3,000 or \$4,000 invested just in product, but I just wanted to forget it. I said, "Well, it can't last too much longer," and it didn't. But around three hours later we had another storm. I remember thinking: "There's got to be a better way."

As I was walking around thinking there has to be an easier way, I got an idea: Why not

## Business exec

sell the sauce. The reason why I wanted to sell spiedies at the State Fair was to use it more or less as a test market before I went to the Boardwalk in Ocean City, N.J. That was always my dream since I was 13, 14 years old. When I was 14 years old, I even went around to some of the real estate offices. I'll never forget it. I remember going in and asking them "How do you get a place on the Boardwalk?" They said when somebody dies.

**Q. So you came home and this is where you found what you would do.**

**A.** I came home a babe in the woods. It was coming home and resetting my goals. I had a business here waiting for me. My uncle had a store, Sataco's in Endicott on Washington Avenue. I thought maybe I could take that business. That was more or less a potential, but I didn't really know if I wanted to stay in Binghamton, I didn't even unpack at my parents' house.

I realized that I needed a base of security. Coming from an IBM family, you have a grand assortment of security. Everyone in my family was an IBMer and is an IBMer. For me to be, let's say, the entrepreneur was a little radical. So I started buying properties here and there. That's basically what I felt would be my security. I have about seven properties now, income properties. The spiedie, like so many things happened by chance.

It grew. And then the next year it grew a little more in the stores. This past year we have tripled our sales. Every year we doubled except this year tripled.

**Q. What year did you first start?**

**A.** 1976.

**Q. So every year doubled.**

**A.** Yes, every year has doubled. In '78, I got involved in some politics. I started this New York State tax reduction movement. I was really incensed. I really put my mouth where my heart was. I really felt I wanted to do something. The only problem was that if you're going to get into politics, it's like being married to two different wives. You can't do it. If you're going to go into politics, you've got to go wholeheartedly. And because of the meetings I was having and all that, my business, I was not really paying attention to it. So I suffered. In '79, I said, look where you're going to get out.

But I also started some other business. As a true entrepreneur, I started the snack bar cafe at Sugarman's. The reason why, was because I had been teaching at BOCES. I was teaching a business course at night. We were talking and I started using an idea for cash flow. I was explaining that one of my problems is that with my spiedie sauce in the winter sales would die down. I wasn't raising any cash, which never allowed me to hire anybody. I'm making the stuff and I'm putting it in the car and I'm delivering it and I'm doing the advertising. It was very, very tough.



During high school, 28-year-old Robert A. Salamida sold spiedies out local taverns as Kelly's Bar & Grill in Endicott. Now he's making his own sauce and seeking to widen its market and buying season.

# Salamida seeks larger market for sauce—

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So by opening up another business that would bring me cash flow, I could actually hire somebody full time who could work there and here. I had somebody in mind. His name was Jim Palleschi. Jim was a neighbor and he had worked for me at the State Fair. In every good organization, you have to have a few good lieutenants. This guy is perfect. He's like my right arm. We have had a very good relationship. If it wasn't for him, I don't think I would be where I am right now. My whole goal has been to build an organization of good people. Jim is the first person I've got. I would imagine in another couple years when I can afford it, I'll hire some other people.

**Q. When did you quit the other jobs?**

A. I left Satico's after one year. I felt it was taking too much time and I really wanted to give the spiedie sauce a go. Today, I have Sugarman's cafe. I have Classic Auto and Assembly, it's a kit car. I have the spiedie sauce and I have the properties. In January, I'm going to buy the store (Satico's). I'm taking the business over. My philoso-

phy is I want to build a very strong base.

But my main business is basically promoting the spiedie sauce and supplementing it with the snack bar at Sugarman's and Satico's Gift and Luggage. This year was really the best year as far as convincing me that we're going to take off on this. Great American and Victory Markets finally took the product. They did a very good job. When they took it into their warehouse, that means they want the product and they'll put it through their entire chain, which is excellent for me. We're selling it on an institutional basis. Eventually, what I could do is sell it to restaurants because the Victory chain uses it in all of their meat departments for their spiedies.

**Q. How much in sales do you expect to have this year?**

A. I haven't even looked at the figures. But I would say probably 200,000 bottles, that include both sizes. The first year, my total sales were about \$5,000. This year, five years later, they'll be over \$50,000. That's just on the spiedie sauce, that doesn't include the snack bar. Each business is sepa-

rate and autonomous. So there's over \$50,000 in sales. That's not bad because last year we did about \$16,000. So that's quite a jump. I really ran my buns off.

**Q. Now your sauce is popular out of this area. Where?**

A. There's a restaurant on Long Island that buys 8 gallons every couple months of spiedie sauce. I don't know what he does with it. Remember, I didn't solicit this stuff; they came to me. When I'm at the State Fair, a lot of people end up walking out with a case of spiedie sauce. And I ship a lot to Rochester and to Buffalo and to Albany. And the people are real anxious to get it. As a matter of fact, they'll come back the next year and they'll say "Boy, we just ran out, we've been waiting for you." I'm thinking this is almost like a religious experience the way these people are talking. I never got excited over pickles or ketchup or anything. So there are a lot of people. Of course, I take it for granted.

Now I'd always thought of following IBM and going in there with the sauce, but the transportation was a problem. But then I got a letter from a lady (in

Charlotte, N.C.) that said "Dear Rob, Help! I am all out of State Fair Spiedie Sauce." She went on to ask if I could mail her some.

When this woman from Charlotte wrote, I thought, I've got to go down there. I worked on the idea and I went down there. This was about a month ago. I just loaded up my little Datsun with Spiedie Sauce. I had one appointment. That was with the A&P. I left at 4 in the morning, drove all the way down, got into Charlotte. I was thinking maybe what I could do is sell the stuff right out of my truck to all these IBMs.

Suffice it to say I ended up with a distributor, very well-established. That's what we're doing right now. We're sending down a 250-case order. I was really surprised to get it. It was a nice lady. She said we'll try it, we'll give it to all the stores. She's going to put it all through North Carolina.

I got a phone call in August from a TV producer in Roanoke, Va. He was inquiring about a franchise or a distributorship. At that point I was thinking, "No I don't want to do that; let me think about it for a while." But since I

have given this lady in North Carolina the distribution of it, what I'm going to do now is anybody who wants to do it, I'll sell them.

**Q. Are you still going to make the sauce here?**

A. We're still going to make it here. We'll just ship it out to them and they'll work on a percentage. I think this will be the fastest way to do it, rather than me waiting to build up.

**Q. You're five years old now. What is going to happen for your business in the next five years or 10 years on two levels: One, in your dreams and, two, realistically?**

A. Five years down the road, my mind sees the potential being harvested. I can see the spiedie sauce in restaurants for a meat marinade. I can see the spiedie sauce distributed entirely in segments of the country if I go with distributorships. But I can also see the new product line. You have to build product line. Five years from

now I would say it might be a little more developed. I have an idea for a restaurant, a fast food item. I already have other products in mind. I have got a new product that for the last three years I have been saying going to be sensational.

**Q. What is it?**

A. It is one of the spice ingredient combinations that we put in the spiedie sauce, called Pinch. But I've got to get it on the shelf. It's the packaging that's the problem.

Probably the most conclusive answer I can give you is five years down the road I don't really know exactly how far we'll be. I know for sure that I'm not going to exploit it and I'm not going to try to do something so fast the motive. I'm going to take it slow and surely. I think that within the next two years you'll see it entirely in New York State. You never know, some might come and say they want it Safeway Markets