

Spreading her culinary story

Eagan woman bringing a homemade party favorite to the masses

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At parties, she couldn't keep enough of it on the table, and now this Eagan resident is hoping her antipasto will also fly off the grocery shelves.

After much encouragement from friends, Judith Tucker is making her salmon spread a business venture, as her product, Splendid Spreads Salmon Antipasto hit the market in November.

After almost 10 years of bringing the spread to social gatherings and hearing "Can I buy this somewhere?" countless times, Tucker finally decided to make that possible.

"It's something I've had in the back of my mind for a long time," she said, as she's worked in accounting and finance for 20 years. "There was always something sort of missing. I thought, I have to some day try this."

While Tucker hasn't abandoned her career – her boss allows her to work three days a week – she decided it was

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Eagan resident Judith Tucker began marketing Splendid Spreads Salmon Antipasto after years of making it for parties. The spread, made with premium Atlantic salmon, can top a variety of foods such as lettuce salads, pita pockets or bread and crackers. (For more photos, visit our online Photo Gallery at www.mnSun.com.)

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time to try running her own business. Her husband, Dale, has also been supportive of her venture, she said.

The centerpiece of that business consists of a tomato-based sauce and plenty of other mix-ins, the most important being Atlantic salmon. Other ingredients to the chunky spread include olives, pickles, cocktail onions and artichoke hearts.

Tucker got interested in antipasto when she first tasted something similar during a trip to the West Coast. After getting some pointers from the maker, she started experimenting in her own kitchen.

While she said her friends have always enjoyed her experiments, the decision to bring it to the public took root when she saw its versatility during a trip to the Mediterranean. There she realized the spread could work just as well with a lettuce salad as it could with crackers or bread.

Aside from being able to be enjoyed with a multitude of foods, Tucker is hoping to appeal to a number of different tastes.

“It’s premium quality and has a certain elegance, but it’s not a highbrow food,” she said.

The versatility combined with the uniqueness of a spread containing fish, is what sold Tucker on being able to create a viable product. Because she hadn’t seen many similar products, she didn’t exactly know where to start when looking for a place to make it.

Since it’s a product that is technically pickled, she figured Gedney would be a good place to start. Since they didn’t deal with seafood, she was eventually pointed to kitchen in Hayward, Wis., that did.

Now, instead of making the spread in a 12-quart pot in her kitchen, she supervises cooks who work with 40-gallon containers.



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Tucker's 10-ounce jars can be found at a few metro stores with a retail price of \$12 to \$14.

“It’s taken a little bit of trial and error,” said Tucker of the process of converting to larger servings.

Being the sole proprietor of her product, Tucker must also take on the task of marketing her spreads, which means going to trade shows or bringing samples along to give to potential vendors when she goes on vacation. Since the spread is shelf-stable, it has built-in advantages related to her marketing efforts.

“As long as you don’t break the jars, it can go anywhere,” said Tucker.

Now that her first spread has had some success, Tucker hopes to put out two more salmon-based spreads in the near future, using a familiar strategy in product development.

“I have 40 to 50 friends who are my official tasters,” she said, one of them being her boss at her other job. “Everybody has been so helpful along the way.”

Those interested in giving Tucker’s antipasto a try can visit Buon Giorno Italia at 981 Sibley Memorial Highway, Lilydale, or Cooks of Crocus Hill locations at 877 Grand Ave., St. Paul, and 3925 W. 50th St., Edina. According to Tucker, a 10-ounce jar usually retails for \$12 to \$14.

For more information on the product, visit www.splendidspreads.com.