

WAAZUU!



By Martin Neideffer

L.A.'s Sauce Hits The Market

CHILDREN OF MILITARY FAMILIES ENDURE HARDSHIPS – an often-nomadic existence being chief among them. But the lifestyle has its advantages, too, and Norma James was determined her children would see and taste the global gumbo of cultures, colors and flavors open to them.

"We lived all over the world – Germany, Hawaii, Boston, Texas ..." recalled Norma's son, Alameda County Sheriff's Office Sergeant L.A. James. "My mother took us to the ballet, Flamenco dances; all sorts of different events. She always put a premium on the finer things in life."

That L.A. embraced those lessons is apparent by the music he listens to (John Coltrane), the wine he drinks (Rombauer) and, especially, by the variety of barbecue sauces he has worked feverishly to put on the market.

Seven varieties of L.A.'s Waazuu! brand sauce are now available on the shelves of Gene's Fine Foods and Andronico's Markets. Soon, you'll find L.A.'s Original Hot, his Blueberry, Blackberry, Boys-n-berry and the other tasty varieties at local Costco stores. Waazuu! will be featured at a Costco Road Show May 22-24 at the store on Davis Street in San Leandro.

Fittingly, among the first to stores to showcase L.A.'s products was the Terrace Market on Foothill Boulevard in San Leandro, a deputy favorite for years.

"L.A. brought it to me when he first started with it," said Terrace Market butcher Bob Fritze. "I'd say 80 to 90 percent of the people who tried it really liked it."

Don't worry. It will not be difficult to spot L.A.'s Waazuu! brand on the shelves. In a sea of sauces (there are over 750 other barbecue sauces on the market) Waazuu! stands alone, by way of its unique flavors, and by its stylish packaging and creative advertising designs. In contrast to other labels, L.A. chose not to attempt to associate his image, or that of any other person, real or fictitious, with Waazuu! "I didn't want to make this about me," L.A. said. "This is all about the sauce."

L.A. approached the creation of his sauces the way an expert vintor approaches the making of fine wines. Waazuu! sauces include only all-natural ingredients and feature berries and spices imported from Brazil, Africa and other exotic locales. "I wanted to create a sauce so unique and flavorful that people had to have mine because nobody else was making it."

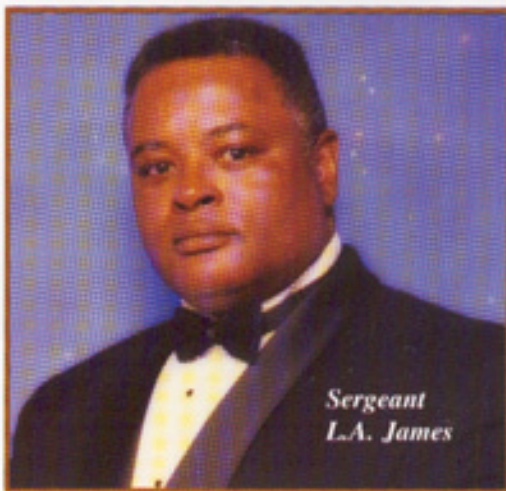
In his mind's palate, L.A. knew what he wanted, "I wanted the consumer to enjoy a different flavor with every bite," he said. Turning the plan into reality was hardly an overnight affair.

Waazuu! roots trace back to the early 1990s when L.A. served as a School Resource Officer out of Eden Township Substation. The SROs held a yearly barbecue for members of the probation department, San Leandro Police Department, school officials and

others with whom they worked. L.A.'s sauce was a hit with some, too hot to handle for others. "Back then I was just trying to make a macho sauce," he said. "I was bored with all the other (store brands)."

L.A. won many fans with his original sauce, the most important of which turned out to be his daughter, Shanthi and son Nicholas. Shanthi and Nicholas often challenged L.A. to refine his sauce and to consider putting it on the market. In fact, it was Shanthi who finally pushed L.A. into action. Formerly an ACSO deputy, Shanthi resigned her position two years ago after the birth of her second child. Soon thereafter she brought home a business license and an interview date with a food consultant.

In the months that followed, L.A. received a crash course in food making and marketing, an experience he described as similar to walking through a large dark room, full of broken glass, barefoot with a small flashlight. "It was two-year test in intestinal fortitude," he



Sergeant
L.A. James

said. After jumping through an array of federal and state bureaucratic hoops, contracting with a producer and settling on a marketing strategy, Waazuu! was up and running.

Among the more enjoyable aspects of the start-up process was coming up with a name for his product. L.A. describes the term "Waazuu!" as something of primal scream his father, the original Lindberg James, would use when he was so overwhelmed with emotion he couldn't think of anything else to say. Such a reaction was what L.A. wanted to elicit from consumers when they tasted his sauces.

"My father was a military man," L.A. said of Lindberg, who passed away in 1997. "But he always wanted to be a business man, an entrepreneur."

Mostly, the wholesome, all-natural ingredients are what make L.A.'s Waazuu! sauce taste so good. But one or two parts James' family history gives it flair.