

21-year- old puts the 'Q' in commercial BBQ sauces

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The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

Jonathan Soares applies his barbecue sauce, Jonathan's Q, to hamburgers on a grill.

Jonathan Soares has been cooking with his mother since he was 5 years old. Now the 21-year-old marketing major at Western Connecticut State University is selling a barbecue sauce inspired by a recipe that's been in his Portuguese family for decades.

Jonathan Q's will be on the shelves of 48 Big Y supermarkets by the end of the month. The 15-ounce glass jars will have a black label that reads: Jonathan's Q. "You can't have BB without the Q."

"The large Q will stand out and catch people's eyes," Soares said.

Jonathan's Q comes in three flavors: Gourmet Spicy Cajun BBQ, Gourmet Honey BBQ, and Gourmet Hickory Teriyaki BBQ.

Soares is proud his product is "all natural."

"Take the ingredients for my Gourmet Honey BBQ, for example," he said. "It's just ketchup, brown sugar, deli mustard, honey, and cider vinegar."

His mother invented the exact recipe which Soares said is a secret.

"I took the basic family recipe and I improved on it," Soares said. "I mixed. I matched. It was months and months of just formulation. I played with different flavors, until I finally came out with Q."

"It has great carmelization. A lot of these barbecue sauces tend to run right off the meat. You put this on your ribs or chicken and it holds on, giving it a great flavor," he said.

This isn't the first business venture for the Danbury native.

At the age of 12, after buying the candy in large quantities at Costco, he was selling small packages of Airheads to his friends at Broadview Middle School for 25 cents each, making about \$14 profit. He's been saving and investing all his money since then.

He worked at Double Twister, a White Street ice cream shop, for six years, starting up an ice cream cart that would cater to various occasions and events all over Danbury.

"Then I started a friend of mine with his marinara sauce and that's how I got involved in the food industry,"

Soares said. "I'm young. I have a great recipe. Why not take a chance and start up my own company?"

Besides being a full-time student at WestConn, Soares is a loan officer for Superior Mortgage Corp. in Ridgefield. After making dozens of phone calls and seeking out the advice of his teachers at WestConn, he launched Q Products, Inc. He's spent about \$10,000 to begin his venture.

"WestConn is a very underrated school," Soares said. "Most of my teachers were former executives at major companies. One teacher was a vice president at Duracell. Just the knowledge that they can give to their students is tremendous. That really helped me out a lot."

His marketing strategy professor, Robert Giacalone, an adjunct at WestConn's Ansell School of Business, said he believes Jonathan's Q will be a success.

"He is a bright kid and he's very creative," Giacalone said. "He just has enormous energy."

"It is a question of having the right product and the right story at the right time," Giacalone said. "Jonathan has to be persistent. He's not afraid to knock on doors and he won't take no for an answer. That's how you have to be. Retail is a tough industry, but once people try his product, they'll see it is an excellent one."

Soares is also planning to create different Italian products, marinades, dressings and infused olive oils.

"I want to tap into certain niches where people have a need for gourmet products," Soares said. "Nowadays, everyone is so busy. Parents are working two jobs. They don't have time to cook and the need is there for gourmet products. People want that restaurant quality taste on their kitchen table without spending 20 or 30 minutes by the stove."

The young entrepreneur has the support of his parents and two younger brothers, Ryan, 16, and Tyler, 11. They're both into sports right now, but Soares said he'll make them into salesmen when they get a little older.

"I'm very proud of him," his mother Bela said. "We are praying he does great things with his business. It is in God's hands and God is in control."

Jonathan's Q is being manufactured by Onofrio's Ultimate Foods, LLC, of New Haven and will be distributed by the Davidson Company in Cheshire. It costs \$4.99 a bottle and is available online at QProductsInc.com.

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