



# Passions

## EATING GOOD

BY **Esther Keane**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **by Amanda MacDiarmid**

**E**rnest Hemingway – journalist, avid traveler and winner of the Pulitzer and Nobel prizes for literature – was passionate about life. He had an overwhelming hunger for life and adventure as evident in his works and larger-than-life persona. But he was also straightforward about enjoying the little things. It was he who simply said in a profile published in *The New Yorker*, “Eat good.”

On that point, Joe Takach, CEO and founder of the Meridian Group, an advertising and marketing firm, is taking Hemingway at his word. Takach, along with award-winning sauce expert Willard Ashburn, owner of the Ashburn Sauce Co., recently produced *The*

*Flavors of Ernest Hemingway*, a line that includes three sauces, a bloody mary mix and a finishing salt.

Takach’s day job, and primary focus, is his agency, which he founded 30 years ago. With clients such as Stihl, the Wounded Warrior Project, the Chrysler Museum, Southern Auto Group and a number of hotels and resorts, Takach rarely spends time out of the Virginia Beach office.

But over the years, he has cultivated a passion for bold tastes, describing himself as a lifelong foodie. Takach developed various sauces to give as client gifts over the holidays.

When his accountant in New York was given the sauces, he men-





Joe Takach toasts his new product line at Lucky Oyster Seafood Grill in Virginia Beach.



tioned his connection to the Hemingway family estate. The opportunity presented itself, and Takach was all-in.

“Something just clicked in my head,” he said. He was then connected to the agent and pitched the idea to the Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park in Illinois in late April. After that, things moved pretty fast.

Ten days after they spoke, Takach had the license, which permits the exclusive use of the author’s name for anything culinary and makes the products part of the official Hemingway Collection. Takach immediately went to Ashburn. Together they came up with recipes inspired by Hemingway’s travels. The collection provides unique, bold flavors to evoke Hemingway’s adventures throughout Africa, France, Spain, Cuba and Key West.

Along with dynamic flavors, the product design is one of a kind, much like the man it represents.

“The bottles are so unique,” Takach said. “There is nothing like

it on the shelf for sauces or mixes.”

In late June, the product was introduced at the Summer Fancy Food Show in New York City.

“People are absolutely amazed,” Takach said. “Some people in NYC wanted to buy cases there and then. It has truly turned a hobby into a side business.”

In July, local specialty food store Taste began carrying the line and now has tastings every weekend. Since then, other gourmet stores around the country have been making purchases, and the Hemingway House in Key West will also sell the products.

“We are looking at 100,000 units in our first year,” Takach said.

With the initial whirlwind having died down, Takach has handed over the day-to-day operations and logistics to his daughter, allowing him to focus on the agency. But having immersed themselves in Papa’s works and life, they see countless culinary possibilities.

Takach said, “It’s all about the flavors.” — IL