

# DELIVERING THE

# Shine

**“It all started before I was born,” Adam Jakush says of the family heirloom hot sauce recipe.**

Jakush grew up in Evanston, IL, but would frequently visit the family farm in Waterford, WI. “I was a city boy by trade and a farm boy on the weekends,” the Wilmette, IL Branch 1107 member said.

His dad, Edward, an MIT graduate who was a chemical engineer and food-science expert, would cook a hot sauce using fresh ingredients, throwing onions, peppers, tomatoes, garlic and seasoning into a pot to experiment, with a young Jakush’s help. Over time, Edward refined a hot sauce recipe loved by friends and family.

At the end of the summer, the carrier’s family would pick lots of vegetables and have a party. “Everyone would leave with a trunk full of vegetables and a jar full of hot sauce,” Jakush said.

When he got into his 20s, “I kind of forgot about it, but my sister reminded me,” he said. She lived in New York City, and she asked their dad to send her and her friends some of the sauce. That renewed his interest.

After attending college in New York City, Jakush spent time trying to figure out his next move, and then it dawned on him.

He contacted his father in 2009 and asked, “Hey, Dad, can I live with you? Can you teach me how to make it?” His father readily agreed, and Jakush spent the summer doing just that.

Jakush planted some vegetables and checked on them every weekend. He then tried out his dad’s techniques while concocting the hot sauce. Soon, “I’d perfected what is now Shady Dan’s,” he said. He started passing out bottles to his family and friends, and it was a big hit.

The carrier has since turned that years-long passion project into his own business selling craft hot sauce using that 50-year-old recipe—but at the time, he wasn’t prepared to make anything more of it.

“I didn’t have the wherewithal with business and accounting,” the carrier explained.

Jakush soon met his wife, and the hot sauce idea went on the back burner as they started a family. He joined the Postal Service in 2015.

That same year, he lost his father to cancer. On his death bed, Jakush told him, “Dad, I promise you...I will take care of my family, and I will commercialize your hot sauce.” His father smiled in response.

In 2019, Jakush told his best friend from childhood, Alex, about the hot sauce and cooked some up for him.

Alex’s response: “Let’s do this.”

Jakush says there are “a lot of boxes you have to check off” before launching a food business, but in June 2021, the two friends got it going into distribution. “He was a logistical genius with his military background. We complemented each other nicely,” the carrier said.

They found a commercial kitchen belonging to a catering company in a Chicago suburb that they could rent out on Sunday afternoons to make a large batch.

“It’s an assembly line,” the carrier said, adding that he and Alex—and



Adam Jakush shows off the three varieties of his Shady Dan's hot sauce.



occasionally a third friend—will “crank up rock ‘n’ roll and start cranking out hot sauce.”

They start by sorting and weighing their produce (sourced locally, when possible, although the peppers are mostly from Texas and Mexico), and then cleaning and prepping them.

After that, they cook all of the ingredients and blend the produce with the acidifying agents in a large vessel. (“I can almost fit in the pot,” Jakush joked.) They heat the mixture to the correct temperature, and sanitize the bottles before putting the sauce in.

Once the sauce is bottled, the containers go into a cooling tank. The final step is applying the shrink bands to label them, and then an expiration date is stamped. They can do everything on site and produce about 500 to 600 bottles in a single day.

“It’s a long day,” he said, but “we’ve got our processes down.”

The cooking process itself is intense and anxiety-inducing being “in the zone, doing so much at once,” Jakush, a self-described “eternal optimist” said, but added that it’s cathartic at the same time. “It’s almost like my yoga, I guess.”

Though it was tough at the beginning to juggle everything, Jakush tries to not let his side hustle interfere with his family life or postal career. Everything is now “totally congru-

ous with the rest of my life,” he said, adding that he works on the sales and marketing side of the business after he puts his kids to bed at night, and on his day off.

Shady Dan’s produces three hot sauces: the flagship sauce Chili’s Last Stand (the carrier’s personal favorite), using red chili peppers; Hab Country, its spiciest thanks to the habanero peppers; and Little Shady’s, a “starter sauce” with green chiles.

The latter was inspired by his now-7-year-old son, who deemed the original two sauces way too hot. So Jakush went to the kitchen, dialed down the spice level and concocted what he calls “a flavor enhancer.” Even the carrier’s 1-year-old son loves it and will ask for it by name.

The reason his sauces taste so good, Jakush thinks, is the use of lemon juice, which he says gives it a “unique complexity that’s not present in most hot sauces—[there’s an] added dimension.”

The name of the company itself, Shady Dan’s, is a bit of an urban legend created by the two partners. The story goes that while around a campfire on the farm at the end of the day, Shady Dan came wandering in and, while sharing a drink, he imparted the secret recipe. “He didn’t talk much, but when he did, you listened,” Jakush said. “The legend of Shady Dan must continue—he showed us the way.”

**The carrier sells his hot sauce at a farmers’ market.**

DELIVERING THE

# Spice



Jakush spent many weekends and summers of his childhood on the family farm in Wisconsin picking vegetables and helping create hot sauce with his father.

The sauce's tagline, "Food science on fire," is in honor of Jakush's dad.

Shady Dan's is available at seven stores and farmers' markets mainly in the Chicago area, as well as through its website at [shadydans.com](http://shadydans.com). A chef at a local brewery loved it so much, they "put it on every table with the ketchup and mustard," the carrier said, which has been helpful with the brand's popularity. They've also been partnering with some local restaurants to have pop-up displays.

Jakush loves his job as a letter carrier and, though he's low-key at work about his side gig, has sought feedback about his condiments from some co-workers. "The only thing I ask is for an honest opinion," he says. "I utilize all the feedback I get to make it better."

Branch 1107 President **Chantay Smith** was gifted some for Christmas.

"My son and I have been enjoying the hot sauce," she said. "Hopefully [Jakush's] product will take off."

Jakush is content with keeping the operation small for the time being, and with trying to grow it slowly and organically. "We're having too much fun doing it ourselves," he said. "We want to work out the kinks and make mistakes when it doesn't cost too much money or time."

The next logical step, he notes, would be to hire a co-packer, who would bottle and label their cooked, blended material for them.

For now, "It makes me happy to get the name and product out there and [be] pouring the foundation," Jakush said.

"I love my hot sauce so much," the carrier continued, adding that his motivation involves simply "trying to share it with the world." **PR**

## James D. Henry appointed NALC vice president

**P**resident **Fredric Rolando** appointed **James D. Henry** of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 as NALC vice president to fill the vacancy created when Lew Drass stepped down from the position on April 30.

A Los Angeles native, Henry began his postal career as a letter carrier in Pomona, CA, in 1988. His path to becoming an NALC activist began the same year when he was unjustly disciplined and his branch came to his aid, resolving the case in his favor.

"Thereafter, I knew I couldn't stand by and see letter carriers treated unfairly," Henry said. "I became a shop steward, and my calling of representing letter carriers began." His appointment as a steward came only six months after he joined the Postal Service.

In 1991, he was appointed as an area steward, and after completing advocate training in 1995, he became an

arbitration advocate for Region 1. In 1998, Henry was appointed to serve as one of NALC's first Step B representatives for the Step B pilot program and again when the program was made permanent. He was elected vice president of Branch 1100 in 1999 and senior vice president in 2008.

President Rolando appointed Henry as a regional administrative assistant (RAA) for Region 1 in 2011. As an RAA, he oversaw six Dispute Resolution Teams, conducted dozens of interventions, represented carriers during multiple unemployment hearings, negotiated thousands of pre-



arbitration settlements and presented more than 150 cases in arbitration. He also negotiated hundreds of local contracts. In 2015, Drass selected him as a facilitator/instructor for the Advanced Formal A and Beyond and arbitration advocate trainings.

Henry is a 22-year Marine Corps veteran. He and his wife, Janice, have three children.

"My guiding philosophy is 'the best ability is dependability,'" Henry said. "Sometimes we must have the courage to do the right thing, even if it is unpopular or difficult. I strive to live up to that in my work for letter carriers." **PR**