

COMMUNITY

Pierce's goes retail with famed sauce

Local Ukrop's stores have first shipment

By Susan Robertson

YORK — For more than 35 years, people have come from miles around to get a taste of Pierce's Pitt Bar-B-Que. Now that flavor is as close as the grocery store.

Available in two flavors, original and honey, "Doc" Pierce's Bar-B-Que Sauce is already available at nearly 20 Harris Teeter stores. Tim Ashman, of Ashman Manufacturing Co. in Virginia Beach, said that it will be on the shelves at about 28 Ukrop's stores by Saturday morning.



Pierce

Owner J.C. Pierce was once hesitant about going retail with his sauces because the recipe has long been a family secret. He's toyed with

the idea for more than a decade.

"It was really scary for me," he said Tuesday. "We've never allowed anyone else to produce the

sauce. No one but my dad, mom and I knew what was in it, including other family members."

Things changed about a year ago.

While filling up at a gas station, a man approached Pierce and said he wasn't a beggar, but he was out of gas and if he didn't get back to the military base he was stationed at he would be considered absent without leave. He wasn't asking for much, just a dollar from everyone he approached. But Pierce used his credit card and filled up the man's tank.

Later he received an e-mail from a Marine commander in Iraq telling him that one of his Marines had received a care package from his family that contained a bottle of Pierce's Pitt Bar-B-Que sauce. It turned out to be the local Marine he'd helped that day.

In his e-mail, the commander asked if the restaurant could send some sauce to Al Asad, Iraq, where the unit was stationed for the holidays. Pierce sent the sauce. What he got in return

made him realize that it was time to make it available to the masses.

"They sent me a picture of a group of Marines sitting on the back of a truck holding up bottles of our sauce," Pierce recalled. "That told me that if there was any time to do this, it was now."

Started in 1971 by his parents, Doc and Verdie Lolabell Pierce, the restaurant has become a regional landmark. The rich tomato-based sauce was first made in the kitchen of the family's house, located next door to the restaurant. It's been sold over the counter for years to the tune of about 1,200 bottles a month. That excludes Internet sales.

Pierce said even if his family's sauce doesn't sell in stores, he'll have no regrets because he had the guts to try. Seeing the bottles with his dad's picture sitting on a shelf in Harris Teeter was the clincher.

"When I walked in and actually saw it there, I was just really, really proud," he said. "It's been a dream come true."



Tim Ashman stocks shelves with Pierce's barbecue sauce at Ukrop's in Monticello Marketplace.

Susan Robertson