

HISTORY

Santos Cocktail Cheese was world-famous

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The newspaper advertisement featured a picture of Bob Hope on the left and Bing Crosby on the right. After a dozen years of six "Road Pictures," the two were at the height of their fame in 1955 at the time of the ad. Between their portraits the copy read, "Bob Hope says: Santos Cocktail Cheese makes my stomach laugh. Bing Crosby says: Santos Cocktail Cheese is the last thing in spreads, and I ought to know."

Given how important Hope and Crosby were, that the pair were willing to give a testimonial for a cheese spread was remarkable. Santos Cocktail Cheese was indeed especially delicious. The soft mixture was spread onto crackers or scooped with crudité. Demand for the specialty was so great it launched a mail-order business and catering concern.

Santos and Lynda de Jesus moved to Palm Springs for good in 1947, having been recruited by Charlie Farrell. Born in 1902, Santos immigrated to San Francisco after high school, from the Philippines after a stop in Singapore where he learned different flavors and how to cook. He studied at night school and with enough credits earned entrance to Stanford University and worked at Menlo Park Country Club. During WWII, he worked for the government. In the desert after the war, he began working at the Desert Inn for Nellie Coffman and in the kitchen of the Palm Springs Tennis Club.

Movie stars and socialites hung out at the bar. Bob Hope was there après golf, using the bar as the 19th hole. On one such occasion he wanted a snack to go with his drink. Santos went to the kitchen and whipped up the cocktail cheese. Santos' daughter, Lynda, recalls it was a spur of the moment recipe for something that "went well with booze." Hope thought it delicious and said, "let's jar it up and I will endorse it."

Soon Santos' imaginative recipe was included in the restaurant offerings, and party guests and bar patrons were clamoring to take home the cheesy concoction.

Realizing there was ample demand, Santos started his own business offering his signature products in 1950. He



Santos de Jesus (left) inside a catering truck with an employee. Santos started offering his signature products in 1950. COURTESY OF PALM SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL

obligingly packaged and mailed jars of cheese and salad dressings to visitors who wanted to take home the taste of Palm Springs. Eventually Santos Cocktail Cheese could be found across the country in fine shops.

The Honolulu Advertiser noted in a food column in 1951, "Whether it's been on the market for a century or for a day the only requirement it needs to appear on the shelves or in the counters at May's is: it must be top quality... Something new in the Delicatessen Counter tho'—and this we will tell about! Jean Aumont, May's Delicatessen Man, is pretty excited about his latest Gourmet Conversation Piece: SANTOS SALAD DRESSING AND COCKTAIL CHEESE. And after one mere sample on our own we agree that it is something to rave about. The Salad Dressing, by Santos, is among the best prepared dressings we've ever had. It's a thick creamy type with a lot of zip and spice. Perfect for tossed salads or stuffed tomatoes and cucumbers and the like. Sort of a fluffy French Dressing with OOMPH."

But Advertiser reserved the highest praise for the cocktail cheese, guessing at the recipe and saying it "is a smoothly blended cream cheese with a beautifully balance blend of seasonings and spices. Among other tang-lenders are

Worcestershire, Celery and Onion Juice, Paprika, and Garlic. There's just enough of every one so that the cheese has a distinct flavor all its own. Can't say it has a garlicky flavor, nor an oniony one. What it is, is DOWNRIGHT GOOD CHEESE. Perfect for stuffing celery, and softened, an excellent cheese dipping sauce. Santos Cocktail Cheese we'd say is one of the rare few spreads that are destined to appeal to every taste, just as they come from the jar."

An obscure fancy food store called Desert Treasures in Arizona offered an assortment of jams, jellies, dates, fruit cakes, and citrus by subscription. There was holiday hamper stuffed with all sorts of delicacies and jars of Santos Cocktail Cheese were included in a choice of two sizes. The Washington Market in Utah boasted it had it exclusively. In Kansas City it was touted along with cheeses from around the globe. It was for sale Kentucky at the most expensive grocery store chain. The Honolulu Advertiser deemed it "An appetizer worthy of the best company, rich and affluent aunts, or the most fastidious man about town."

Santos was manufacturing jars of cheese at a terrific rate. The whole family was enlisted to help in the business. Six older brothers and daughter Lynda

learned to make it and pack it to send all over the world.

Meanwhile Santos himself was now busy managing the bar at Thunderbird Country Club. He was in demand and began to cater the lunches and special affairs at the Committee of 25, a private men's club that opened its doors in Palm Springs in 1948. He coordinated the kitchen and set up unique dining experiences at Deep Well Ranch from 1952 through 1957. The cocktail cheese manufacturing was located at The Center, next to KDES and the Desert Sun. The newspaper and radio men were dependable customers, and word of the cheese spread around town.

All the swankiest parties in the desert were catered by Santos. Without a doubt, Santos fed the famous. Bob Hope and Bing Crosby were pictured in his advertisements and Santos was a fixture at their parties. Frank Sinatra was a regular customer. Phil Harris, Alice Faye, and Lily Pons depended on him for their parties. Santos fed 2,000 people at the housewarming opening of the Spa Hotel and 700 people at the Desert Museum after Arthur Rubinstein played a benefit concert. He catered the first dinner of the Bob Hope Golf Classic at Robert McCullough's Thunderbird home.

Hope continued to promote the cheese, sending it to President Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, foreign dignitaries and all his friends.

The manufacturing concern expanded and moved with the newspaper and radio station to the newly built Sun Center. Santos tried to retire once but was too bored. He began spending the summers in Michigan managing the Little Harbor Yacht Club, catering to foremost families like the Wrigleys and the Fords. Santos turned down an offer to buy his successful Palm Springs catering business which he'd built with such ingenuity. Santos continued to work for the rest of his long life, making stomachs laugh and customers happy.

Continuing the family tradition, daughter Lynda is again whipping up Santos Cocktail Cheese for her niece's new bar, Dead or Alive, on Palm Canyon. It pairs perfectly with a glass of wine.

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