



Ricos Products Co. recently moved some of its manufacturing back to Arlington, where it produces On the Border corn tortilla chip products, as well as popcorn. (Photos: Dwayne Lee, Southern Flair Photography)



The Arlington plant represents a return for the company, which invented baseball stadium nachos in 1976.

Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and ... **nachos!**

Ricos Products, which created baseball stadium nachos here, returns to Arlington • By Corey Callaway

Ricos Products Company Inc. recently moved some of its manufacturing back to Arlington. The company is named after Enrico Liberto from the second of five generations of family who have worked at the now-San Antonio-based company. Founded in 1909, it produces a wide variety of snack foods that are sold in 57 countries through 200 or so distributors.

That's the nutshell about the move and about the company, but what makes both big news here is a page of history you might not have read.

Frank Liberto, third generation family member, invented baseball stadium nachos. And he did it right here in Arlington – baseball stadium nachos were first served in 1976 at Texas Rangers games at Arlington Stadium.

Though nachos date as far back as 1943 to Piedras Negras, Mexico, Arlington – through Frank Liberto's efforts – takes the honor as the baseball stadium nacho pioneer, no small feat, given how the item is now a staple at sports venues all around the country.

Frank created what no one else had before: a pump-able consistency of the orangey-goopy goodness we see today – what the company calls "cheese sauce." The Wisconsin cheddar-based cheese sauce is poured over crisp corn chips that are topped with tangy jalapeno peppers.

To be able to serve customers quickly, Frank came up with the idea of warming up a can of cheese sauce so that it could be ladled over the chips and then sprinkling jalapenos in such a manner that they could be served in less than a minute.

FRANK'S ORIGINAL BLEND included a concoction of jalapeno pepper juice and water. I remember this as a kid. At that age, my palate had not yet matured to a point I could manage the spicy heat without a big dose of ice cold Coca-Cola to put the fire out. I love to eat them now, and I would like to feast on a batch made the traditional way: with the jalapeño juice mixed in. I may have to try this at home!

When the new product was launched in 1976, the concession operators were concerned that nachos might cannibalize other popular items such as popcorn, hot dogs and sodas. Thus, Frank was not allowed a concession stand to sell his new product; he had to build carts from which to sell the delectable treats.

The corn tortilla chip, along with the combination of cheesy sauce and jalapeno peppers, proved an instant hit with baseball fans in Arlington – and now the ballpark nacho is a staple in stadiums everywhere.



Soon there would be lines 20 people deep waiting for the spicy snack. Nachos were an immediate success. In the first year nachos were offered to the public Arlington Stadium sold Ricos nachos at the rate of one sale for every two-and-a-half patrons. In its first year, \$800,000 in sales were recorded over a season attended by 1,200,000 fans. By comparison, popcorn (the previous highest-selling snack) sold only to one in 14 patrons for total sales of \$85,000.

Frank claims that the one ingredient that accounted for the shift in stadium snack preference was the jalapeno pepper. Of course, beverage sales spiked, too, as you need something cool to drink with a spicy snack.

BY 1978, THE SPICY SNACK became available at Texas Stadium, then home of the Dallas Cowboys, where iconic Monday Night Football announcer Howard Cosell would put nachos on the map. One day while Cosell sat alongside Frank Gifford and Don Meredith giving viewers the play-by-play, a plate of nachos was brought to the broadcast room. Cosell took up some dead air time and said, “They brought us this new snack . . . what do they call them? Knock-o’s or nachos?”

Cosell, who liked the funny sounding name, started using the word “nachos” in the description of plays and often alluded to them in a

strident voice: “Here’s the kick ... that was a nacho man!” Or, “What a nacho run that was!” Cosell and others used the word for weeks afterward, in effect branding the treat far beyond the confines of its Arlington, Texas, birthplace.

As noted previously, Ricos Products Company is headquartered in San Antonio, where it manufactures most of its fare. The new Ricos Products Company’s facility in Arlington manufactures corn tortilla chips and popcorn. Its iconic cheese sauce is contracted out to a couple of companies, and the recipe is a carefully guarded secret. It sells products in 57 countries working through more than 200 distributors worldwide.

The family-owned company has fourth and fifth generations represented in its workforce today with Tony Liberto, Frank’s son, at the helm as its current president.

Welcome back to Arlington, Ricos! You can find many of the company’s cheese sauce snacks at HEB food stores ... but I recommend eating them in their original and natural habitat: sitting in the stands and taking in your favorite sports event!

Much of the information in this article came from the Smithsonian.com, the Detailed History of Nachos, which was written by K. Annabelle Smith, and Ricos.com.