

Air Force veteran's hot sauce takes flight



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Sean Maloney, owner of 13 Stars Hot Sauce, credits his mother for his lifelong love of hot sauce: She ate Taco Bell hot sauce packets when she was pregnant with him. The idea to become an entrepreneur came later, while he was serving in the Air Force as a cyber systems operator in Djibouti, Africa.

"I was looking for an outlet to be creative when I came back," says Maloney, a Rhode Island native. "I started reading a lot of books about entrepreneurship."

13 Stars Hot Sauce launched in Warren, Rhode Island, at the end of 2019, after Maloney experimented with hot sauce recipes made with jalapeños from a friend's garden. He admits most were terrible, but some were magic. At a tasting with family and friends, Maloney's mother said she could see him selling the hot sauce. Feeling inspired, he took samples to a New England Patriots football game to see if he was on to something.

"Every single person who tried it, said, 'I need more of this in my life, this is amazing,'" Maloney says. "We hit the ground running."

Right now, there are six flavors, ranking from mild to wild. Dragon's Breath Hot Sauce, a soy sauce, brown sugar and siracha blend, won first place in the Boston Hot Sauce Festival in 2024. Maloney's personal favorite is the Mean Green – a mild sauce with jalapeño and lime.

"We don't ferment any of our sauces," he says. "We pick all our peppers at peak ripeness and then blend them with spices and vinegar. It allows for this 'from-the-garden flavor profile.'"

The 13 Stars Hot Sauce name and logo reflect Maloney's military career and his home state. He enlisted in 2015 and continues to serve in the Air National Guard as a commissioned officer. He's scheduled to be promoted from first lieutenant to captain in December 2025.

The stars in the logo signify the 13 original states and the red star on top honors Rhode Island, the first state to renounce allegiance to the British crown. A portion of the proceeds from each bottle sold supports organizations connected to first responders and veterans, especially programs connected to mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, a diagnosis that came post deployment for Maloney.

Maloney's entrepreneurial endeavor has proven to be a surprisingly therapeutic outcome for treating his PTSD. "It's been an awesome outlet for keeping him in the present," he says.



On the cover: Air Force veteran and entrepreneur Sean Maloney. Photo courtesy of 13 Stars Hot Sauce. Article by Vanessa Infanzon. Published nine times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com. ©2025 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by Content Spectrum.

