

CALS ALUMNI GET LOST IN PIZZA

Long-time friends establish Lost Pizza Co. franchise

By Sarah Buckleitner



Top: Happy Hippie Pizza.
Lost Pizza Company in Indianola,
Mississippi.

Left: Preston Lott and Brooks Roberts, CALS
alumni and owners of Lost Pizza Company
franchise. (Photos Submitted)

FROM SOWING WHEAT SEEDS IN SOIL to kneading that perfect pizza crust, Lost Pizza founders and CALS alumni **Brooks Roberts** and **Preston Lott** have the process of pizza making down pat.

For Roberts and Lott, both their friendship and love of food began at an early age. “I grew up on my family’s farm in Moorhead, Mississippi. While I spent a lot of my time on the farm, I developed a love for cooking while hanging around my grandmother’s kitchen. I met Preston in high school, and we became best friends right away,” Roberts explained.

For Lott, who grew up in Indianola, Mississippi, the restaurant business was in his blood.

“I was raised in the kitchen at PeaSoup’s (also known to folks in the Delta as Lott-A-Freeze). My grandfather opened the place over 50 years ago. Growing up, Brooks and I would often sneak into PeaSoup’s late at night to cook for our friends,” Lott said.

PeaSoup’s is a Delta diner/dairy bar that is known for its milkshakes, burgers and poboys, but is especially famous for its fried Gulf shrimp.

While the pair had always dreamed of opening up a restaurant, they ended up going to Mississippi State University together. It was never a question for Roberts that he’d end up wearing maroon.

“To be honest, I never considered going

to another school,” Roberts said.

While at Mississippi State University, they paired up as roommates and both pursued degrees in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Lott earned a degree in poultry science while Roberts earned a degree in agricultural science.

“After a while the dream of opening a restaurant began to fade. I got a job as a cotton researcher for Delta Pine while Preston worked in egg production for Cal-Maine. Several years went by, and I left the Delta and moved to the Virgin Islands with my wife to work as a scuba instructor, while Preston returned to the family restaurant business,” Roberts said.

The move to St. Croix came on a whim, a further example of how Roberts takes the things most people only dream of and turns them into reality.

“My wife and I didn’t have kids yet, and we wanted to have an adventure before we settled down. We went to St. Croix on vacation and fell in love with it, so we quit our jobs and moved there a month later. It was crazy, but a ton of fun,” Roberts said.

When Lott came to visit Roberts on St. Croix, they talked about their old dream to open up a restaurant in the Delta. That, combined with the fact that their hometown of Indianola lacked a place to get good pizza and wings, spurred them to try and make their dream a reality.

“It became real when we got a call

from Preston, who was still living in Mississippi, telling us to pack our bags and come home, because the offer we had made on a building had been accepted,” Roberts explained.

“We both love the Mississippi juke joint vibe, and have always had an eye for cool local folk art. We started gathering unique artwork, music memorabilia, and old architectural salvage pieces. Then we found a location next door to PeaSoup’s and set out

to create Lost Dog Pizza Company,” Lott said.

The pair was able to relive some of their high school memories as they prepared for the restaurant to open.

“Once again, we would cook for our friends late at night after PeaSoup’s closed, and experiment with different recipes until eventually we got everything just right,” Lott said. “Many of Lost Pizza Co.’s menu items are based on PeaSoup’s recipes.”

While the name initially came from a bar on St. Croix, they eventually dropped the “dog” and the company became known as Lost Pizza Company. It first opened its doors in 2007, and was quickly followed by a second location in Cleveland, Mississippi a year later.

The company has grown fast; only ten years later and there are 13 Lost Pizza Co. locations scattered throughout Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas, with plans in the works to expand to Alabama and Florida this year.

And the pair isn’t finished thinking up exciting business ventures.

“We have another restaurant concept in the works called Pizza Social. Currently there’s one location in Bartlett, Tennessee.”

While their time spent in the agricultural industry might have been a deviation from their eventual careers in the restaurant business, their degrees from Mississippi State University served them well.

“Agriculture and the food industry are closely connected. Our time at Mississippi State provided knowledge of the agriculture industry, as well as the skills we needed to run a business and deal with people,” Roberts said.

Not only that, but their understanding of the food system has allowed them to make some of the best pizza in Mississippi.

“Understanding food production plays a big role in selecting the products we use in our recipes; we are able to look for the highest quality ingredients. It’s important to know where your ingredients come from,” Lott explained.

Craving a bite of melty cheese, tangy sauce, and fluffy crust? Check out the Lost Pizza Co. locations near you: www.lostpizza.com.

