A FORMER GLOBAL service manager for WorldCom, Cackalacky founder Page Skelton loves to cook and barbecue in his spare time. He did not set out to create a commercial product. “I started making this sauce for my friends and family, and they started buying it from me in little Mason jars,” recalls Skelton. “And I started selling it out of the trunk of my car.”

Using sweet potatoes was a serendipitous fluke. “The idea of sweet potatoes dawned on me one day as I was just looking for a way to thicken up the base,” attests Skelton. “Almost 50 percent of all the sweet potatoes grown in the U.S. actually come from North Carolina. For me it was a no-brainer: What do I have a lot of that I can thicken this stuff up with? And it was like magic.”

After the sauce won a national food award, Skelton decided to get serious about the product and set out to bottle it. He came home one day to find his wife, Caroline, pouring sauce from his test bottle onto cheese and crackers. She looked up at him and said, “Don’t mess with this recipe. You’ve got it!”

As for that name, Cackalacky, it’s an old slang term for the Carolinas. “At a barbecue, one of his friends said, ‘Hey, pass me some of that Cackalacky sauce,’” says Skelton. “The name stuck, and they trademarked it.”

Serendipity struck again when Skelton was at a tasting event sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture a few years ago. He met the local Costco warehouse manager and told him the Cackalacky story while the manager tried a taste of plain chicken topped with a dollop of the sauce, a complex blend of 23 natural ingredients.

“I could just see it in his eyes,” recalls Skelton. “The next thing I knew I was surrounded by a gaggle of Costco store managers all happily munching away on Cackalacky Spice Sauce samples and asking me lots of questions about my business. The rest, as they say, is history.”

He adds, “I love sharing our Costco success story with folks because it’s a great example of how the company actively strives to be in tune with the local experience in the communities in which they operate.” —Steve Fisher