

ALEXANDER VALLEY GOURMET™

FINE SPECIALTY FOOD PRODUCTS



Life After Work

April 2007

These talents left old careers for a life in wine and food. One was a hip-hop artist who saw his music career falter, then found a new calling as a wine expert. Another was a telecommunications executive who turned his lifelong obsession—making pickles—into a business. The people profiled on the following pages all made a switch in their careers to follow their love for wine and food—with remarkable success. Read on to find out what inspired these life-changing decisions, and how the bold moves paid off.

Dave Ehreth

PICKLE PERFECTIONIST

"When I was a kid, I'd eat a couple of pounds of pickles in one sitting," says Dave Ehreth, 57, who founded Alexander Valley Gourmet, his Sonoma, California, pickle company, two years ago. Though he grew up near San Francisco, Ehreth became addicted to the garlicky, half-sour pickles his father, a native New Yorker, introduced him to. Even as Ehreth, an engineer, worked in telecommunications and eventually started his own company, Westwave Communications, he experimented with making his own New York-style pickles. "It got my mind off the stress at work," he says.

Ehreth studied food scientist Harold McGee's seminal book, *On Food and Cooking*, in addition to Russian and Jewish cookbooks to perfect his pickles, meticulously keeping notes on each batch in spreadsheets. "Look, I'm an engineer," he says with a laugh. When Ehreth sold the rights to his company's software in 2003—"I sold it to a really big corporation, and there wasn't a lot of personal satisfaction anymore"—he decided to turn to his lifelong passion: pickles. He and his wife, Lisa, rented a small production facility in Healdsburg, California, and built a temperature-controlled fermentation room to make two styles—a sweet-spicy bread-and-butter type, spiked with serrano chile and cumin, and a New York-style version. Today, Ehreth's pickles are carried by many Bay Area shops as well as by Whole Foods Markets in Northern California. This spring, the line will expand to include pickled mushrooms and peppers along with sauerkraut. Ehreth probably won't be selling this company anytime soon. —Ratha Tep
Alexander Valley Gourmet; \$6.50 for 24 oz from Sonoma Chef; 707-544-2337 or www.sonomachef.com.