

THE PRODUCE NEWS

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Dear produce industry friends,

Faster than a speeding potato truck. More powerful than a buy-one-get-one-free promotion. Able to leap from city to city across the entire United States.

That's our Idaho Potato Commission field team -- the six awe-inspiring guys who put the "super" in superhero when it comes to helping the retail and foodservice industries push potato sales sky high.

We created our award-winning superheroes print ad campaign seven years ago as a tongue-in-cheek way to showcase our field personnel. But we're very serious about all of the strengths the Idaho Potato Field Force brings to the industry. All six have extensive backgrounds in produce, and they're armed with the latest data on how best to merchandise and promote Idaho potatoes. More than that, each one is a "people person" who prides himself on really listening to his customers and meeting their unique needs.

For 40 or more weeks of the year, our superheroes are on the road, not writing orders but instead educating the industry about our super spuds and providing a wealth of merchandising resources. They offer an invaluable service that's unmatched among commodity organizations. And their hard work is a big reason for the overwhelming success of IPC's annual Potato Lover's Month retail display contest, which has grown from 600 to more than 5,000 displays in produce departments nationwide during the past 15 years.

So step aside, Captain America and Superman, Batman and the Green Hornet. You may be able to perform daring feats of physical prowess, but you're no match for our six Idaho potato superheroes in the produce arena. This special Idaho potato issue of *The Produce News* pays tribute to the IPC men beneath the capes and the many sources of their super merchandising powers. We hope you find them as inspirational as we do!

Frank Muir

President and CEO
Idaho Potato Commission

The Idaho Potato Commission has hired Alan Kahn as the new vice president of foodservice. Kahn will rely on his 25 years of foodservice and marketing experience to develop and implement atten-

tion-grabbing campaigns that encourage greater Idaho potato consumption at the foodservice level.

During his tenures at Ore-Ida Foods, McCain Foods USA, and the J.R. Simplot

Co., Kahn was primarily involved in sales, marketing, and new product development for both retail and foodservice products. As a member of the executive team at the J.R. Simplot Co.,

Kahn's responsibilities included business acquisitions, corporate alliances, joint ventures and innovative foodservice products. While at McCain and Ore-Ida, Kahn was directly responsible for the potato foodservice brands, including new product introductions, product management, sales and marketing.

Kahn deepened his foodservice and marketing expertise at Pilgrim's Pride Corp. where he was the director of sales for the western region of the country. Prior to that he was the vice president of marketing for Clear Springs Foods.

Most recently, Kahn served as the bureau chief of communications and marketing for the Idaho Department of Fish & Game, where he was responsible for all internal and external communication efforts, including hunter and aquatic education, the agency website, all digital production, marketing

and the MK Nature Center. He also developed a framework for integrating all components of customer support and sales data, advertising, public relations, market outreach and media planning.

As vice president of foodservice at the IPC, Kahn will supervise three promotions directors who are in the field every day of the week calling on foodservice distributors, produce houses and terminal markets. Kahn will also develop foodservice promotions, launch incentive contests for operators, create training programs, videos and educational materials, and coordinate the IPC's presence at some of the biggest food/restaurant shows in the country.

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GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

WESTERN RETAIL REP KENT BEESLEY

As Kent Beesley sees it, exceeding retailers' expectations is all in a day's work. So when the team at Northgate Gonzalez Market in Southern California wanted to create the world's largest Idaho potato display in early 2016, Beesley was happy to put his promotional superpowers to work.

More than 100,000 pounds of Idaho spuds took center stage for the store's entry that year in the annual Idaho Potato Commission Potato Lover's

Month contest, with 10 couches constructed of 10-pound Idaho potato bags. A four-hour launch event for the display featured more than 30 chefs and bloggers, a live morning TV show broadcast on Telemundo and, of course, some tasty spud sampling.

"We're not just out there promoting potatoes, we're really assisting retailers with the category," said Beesley, the IPC's retail promotion director for the West. "We go above and beyond what is required, helping them with space allocation, profits, volume, presence. We're a one-stop shop for the potato category."

Beesley comes by his produce savvy naturally. "My dad was in the produce business his whole life. It's in my blood, and I absolutely love it," he said.

His 45-plus years in the industry began at City Market Inc. in Grand Junction, CO, where he worked for 27 years as produce manager, produce retail supervisor and produce buyer/category manager. The knowledge Beesley gained in every aspect of the retail produce industry was invaluable for his later work as a regional manager and marketing specialist for the Washington Apple Commission, and then as an account manager at Melissa's World Variety Produce, selling more than 100 different items.

In 2007, Beesley joined the IPC as retail promotion director for the Western United States and Canada, where he works directly with retailers to improve the potato category.

"Potatoes can get put on the back burner since they already have a household penetration of 88 percent, and sometimes retailers don't put a lot of focus on increasing

potato sales," he said. "My job is to say, 'don't forget about this category, because it contributes a high volume and profit.' I enjoy getting them back on target with potatoes."

The IPC superheroes retail print ad campaign definitely draws attention to all of the brand's promotional efforts, said Beesley, which makes his job easier – and more fun.

"I get comments [on the superhero ads] every time I do an account call," he said. After reaching his destination at one Northwest retailer with a maze of offices, Beesley said the customer told him that finding his way back to the lobby should be easy if he used his superpowers.

"But he actually had to walk me back," Beesley laughed.



SEEKING OUT TEACHABLE MOMENTS

SOUTHERN RETAIL REP BILL SAVILONIS

Bill Savilonis gave up teaching junior high math many years ago, but he still knows how transformational education can be. As the IPC's retail promotion director for the South, Savilonis has made it his special mission to do whatever it takes to get his customers the information they need.

"I am a great detective, and I try to know my customer and what they are looking for or are interested in," he said. "It's a good feeling to be able to help somebody. When I hear them say, 'Oh yeah, I didn't think of that,' and I see that my information registers with them, it's just like when a student puts it all together."

Savilonis graduated from Jacksonville University in Florida with a degree in teaching, but the produce industry has always been part of his life. His father was a produce buyer and division merchandiser for 28 years and later managed a potato, onion and tomato repack facility. Savilonis worked with his dad at a wholesaler produce warehouse on weekends, Saturdays and school breaks throughout college and during his four years as a teacher.

"I really consider those some of my best years — learning about the business, being able to go to my father and talk to him without being embarrassed about not knowing something," said Savilonis.

That knowledge served him well when he opted to make produce his career, working in produce sales and at a Florida produce brokerage before switching his allegiance to Idaho potatoes in 1991.

"When I started, we promoted and sold one potato—the Russet Burbank," he recalled. "Today we've made the public and retailers aware that the same Idaho ground and quality of weather that grows good russets also grows good red, gold and specialty potatoes."

Savilonis said he's just one of many superheroes supporting Idaho potatoes, from the farmers who plant them to the truckers who deliver them to the unloaders at wholesale and retail chains.

"Everybody needs to get it done well and on time to protect that product — it's amazing. Our game has always been better than anyone else's," he said. "And we're also educating retailers and wholesalers as we go along about how to handle the product properly."

In the past few years, the IPC has developed a wider net of resources to help both retailers and consumers,

Savilonis explained. In fact, he personally communicates with consumers as part of his job.

"I get emails from consumers, usually asking where they can find our product, but sometimes they let us know what they think about our product," he said. "If they leave a number, I'll call them and talk to them, or if it's an email, I'll send them an email. I'll give them some pointers on what they should do to see that their experience is turned around. We want them to have a good Idaho product."

SUPER STATS

Secret identity: Bill "Speedy" Savilonis

Secret lair: Jacksonville, FL

Retail territory he protects: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

Superhuman power: Washing and waxing his 1984 Mazda RX-7

Favorite fellow superhero: Sherlock Holmes

UPPING HIS GAME

NORTHEASTERN RETAIL REP DAVE RHODES

Brutal competition is nothing new for Indianapolis native Dave Rhodes. He played football for powerhouse Warren Central in high school and now helps coach the team, ranked No. 1 in the Hoosier state and 10th nationally among high schools.

But with football, as with his career in the produce industry, Rhodes is all about encouraging others to compete harder by improving their own game.

"We're looking to help our kids grow [on the football team]," said Rhodes, the IPC's retail promotion director for the Northeast. "And with retailers, if we are able to come in and help them out with one category and take some of that pressure off to help them drive more sales in their category with Idaho potatoes, then we are doing our job."

Rhodes has more than 40 years of produce experience to draw on, starting his industry career in 1983 after a four-year tour in the U.S. Marine Corps. His first job was at Marsh Supermarkets, a regional retailer in Indianapolis with over 100 stores, where he had also worked as a service clerk during his teenage years.

"I just fell in love with it," he said. "I love getting to talk to different people every day and doing something different every day."

Rhodes left Marsh for a time to work in produce at a northern Michigan supermarket chain and a Midwestern distributor, but he returned to Marsh in 1999 as a produce category manager and worked his way

up to become vice president of produce and floral.

Joining the IPC in 2017 was a natural transition, Rhodes said, because he had been impressed by the depth of merchandising and marketing insights that IPC reps provided over the years.

"I really enjoyed working with my IPC rep, and I always felt it would be a good organization to work for," said Rhodes. "They represent potato growers very well."

Having firsthand knowledge about the value of Idaho potatoes also gave him confidence that he could effectively coach retailers in how to maximize both potato and produce sales, just as he himself had been coached by mentors throughout his career.

"Mystrongsuit is that I can sit down and converse with directors of produce and category managers and understand the situations they're going through," said Rhodes. "I can share similar situations and

offer help based on how I handled the issues, and what I've seen that works in the produce department."

And of course, he's up for a good baked russet topped with butter, sour cream and cheese.

DRIVING IT HOME

KEN 'STRETCH' TUBMAN RIDES OFF INTO THE SUNSET

After 15 years of coming to retailers' rescues, Ken "Stretch" Tubman traded in his spudly superhero cape for a golf cart last year. And the retired retail promotion director/Northeast for the Idaho Potato Commission couldn't be happier that he's no longer traveling up in the sky every week.

"We love our golf cart," said Tubman, who lives in a Florida retirement community with more than 70 miles of golf cart paths. "I bought it four years ago, and we already have over 6,000 miles on it. In fact, I've got a new one coming in to replace it, and it's so quiet you can't even hear it!"

Tubman and his wife, Diane, made the move to Florida from Boston four years ago to help ease into retirement (not to mention escaping snowy East Coast winters). In 2017, Tubman spent four months imparting his Idaho potato wisdom to Dave "Dynamite" Rhodes, who took over the Northeast territory, before saying a fond farewell to working life, but not to the many friendships he's made over the years in produce.

"I always felt good about my work because you're helping people on a regular basis, increasing sales," said Tubman. "It's all about the relationships you build. I had a small company in Pennsylvania that I worked with that acquired three stores and had a lot of floor space. The produce director didn't really know how to set up the store, so it looked full even though they didn't need to have the volume it had before [as part of a larger chain]. The guy asked me to do a reset with him to make it look good, and it was really fun. We're friends forever — he even came to my retirement party."

Tubman discovered his merchandising superpowers at an early age, starting at a wholesale produce company when he was just 17. "Then later I went into retail, and I really enjoyed merchandising — getting people to buy things they never thought they would buy when they walked into the store," he said.

After eight years in produce at Whole Foods Market and then running his own produce distribution business in the Boston area, Tubman joined the IPC in 2003 and helped blaze a path to data-driven category management supported by resources like Nielsen and Market Track.

"When Seth Pemsler came on board [as vice president-retail/international] in 2006, he provided us with tools we didn't have when I started, to make the job easier. We had marketing data and sales graphs from all the regions at our fingertips," Tubman said.

Today, Tubman still enjoys the fruits of his labor in the form of Idaho spuds at most meals. "An Idaho russet can be used for so many things, not just for baking," he said. "Mashed potatoes, for example, come out really good when made with russets."

And he says his friends and family know better than to admit to buying any other kind of potato. "If they do, they hide it when I come over," he quipped.

He's also savoring his memories of the industry while making new ones. Last fall, he and his wife took a road trip through the South and Midwest and visited several of his former customers.

"We like to travel," Tubman explained. "We cruise two to three times a year in the Caribbean too."

But Tubman hasn't completely abandoned his time in the sky, even though he says he's flown on enough airplanes to last a lifetime.

"I bought a drone about six months ago, and I'm having a lot of fun with that!" he laughed.

THE ULTIMATE SUPERHERO

IPC'S FOODSERVICE CHAMPION HANGS UP HIS GLOVES

Don Odiome may have retired in December, but he's still a legend in the world of those who cook with Idaho potatoes for a living.

As the Idaho Potato Commission's vice president-foodservice/website — and the all-knowing Dr. Potato of Internet fame — the 72-year-old Odiome served as a force for truth, justice and Idaho spuds for the past 29 years. From partnering with food bloggers to mixing it up with chefs, he's pushed the edge of the envelope to propel Idaho tubers onto more and more menus.

"We gave him the freedom to be creative and do some things he'd always wanted to do on the foodservice side, and that's part of

why he's had such longevity here and was still having fun," said Frank Muir, IPC president and chief executive officer.

These days, Odiome is enjoying spending more time with his wife of 50 years, Candy, and their dog, Baker, and reflecting back on a lifetime of service to the foodservice industry. It all began, as so many careers do, with a high school job that sparked his interest in an entire industry.

use while working with corporate and high-volume unit chefs. He determined right away that chefs were more accessible than purchasing agents, and more receptive to adding new menu items using Idaho potatoes.

"Don is an amazing resource when it comes to potatoes," said Steve Sturm, senior vice president of food and beverage for Firebirds Wood Fired Grill, based in Charlotte, NC. "He is more knowledgeable than any-

A seed takes root

Odiome, who grew up in the Denver area, got his start in the working world as a teen at fast-food outlets and country clubs. He went on to major in business administration and hotel/restaurant management at the University of Denver, and then moved into marketing and operations on the non-commercial side of the business — colleges, universities and business dining. After owning fresh pasta restaurants and a regional pizza franchise, along with consulting on several major sandwich, coffee and dessert concepts, Odiome zeroed in on produce as promotions director for a California Lettuce Commission in Salinas.

In 1989, Odiome transferred his talents to a new mission: the Idaho potato. He and his wife moved from California to Boise, which both of them felt was reminiscent of a smaller Denver. Once ensconced in Idaho, Odiome put his wide-ranging foodservice background to good

one I have ever known in regards to potatoes. He represents the growers extremely well, helping the end-users understand the care and dedication they have for their products.”

Odiome introduced new tools for foodservice, such as the IPC’s annual chef’s calendar of monthly Idaho potato recipes from working chefs, and added educational and training resources on preparation, storage and food safety.

One of his most popular creations is the IPC website blog written by his alter ego, Dr. Potato, which answers frequently asked questions about ingredients, techniques and menus. Dr. Potato applies his practical and culinary experience to questions like “How do I bake 50 Idaho potatoes at one time?” and “What are the steps to preparing perfect fresh-cut French fries for my new restaurant?”

Today, more than 700 Dr. Potato

posts offer a comprehensive library of tips for foodservice, consumers and retailers and drive traffic to the IPC website.

Chef talk

Odiome also decided that developing personal relationships with industry chefs was key to getting out his message about Idaho spuds, so he went on the road, logging thousands of miles over the years. Trade shows, restaurant kitchens, industry gatherings — wherever chefs were, Odiome was there to advise them on correct, creative and profitable usage of Idaho potatoes in their operations, and more.

“I know that every time I am around Don, I’ll learn something or be inspired from him,” said Dave Woolley, chef and proprietor of CD Culinary Approach in Denver. “It isn’t just about food and the industry, but I’m also inspired by his human spirit. His actions and his passion for food and people, and knowledge of both, has helped mentor me, personally and professionally.”

In fact, Odiome’s people skills are legendary in the foodservice industry, said Muir.

“Once you meet him, you never forget him,” said Muir. “I’ve seen him interact with well-known chefs,

lesser-known chefs and unknown chefs, and he treats them all with the same interest and inquisitive mind to find out what makes their role as a chef exciting for them. He's made it very easy for people to talk to him, to like him and to want to be part of his world."

Bring on the bloggers

Odiome had always been interested in using technology to educate, so it wasn't out of character when he asked if he could branch out and shake things up on the IPC website about 10 years ago. He wanted the IPC to become an early adopter of non-traditional methods of targeting consumers by linking up with food bloggers.

Odiome signed himself up for Camp Blogaway, an annual gathering of food bloggers in the mountains of Southern California, and put out a call for YouTube videos featuring Idaho potatoes. The result: a team of 100-plus food bloggers assembled by Odiome, who encourage the use of Idaho potatoes in recipes and videos that are shared on the IPC website.

"It is now a cornerstone of our recipe additions, with more than 500 added to the website, as well as content for our programs with consumers," said Odiome. "Doing food videos with bloggers was such a winner. Typically, a professionally produced recipe video could cost upward of \$25,000, and then we still had to figure out how to get the information out to a large audience. Bloggers were already doing this at a fraction of the cost. It's worked out very well for us."

Odiome is also a favorite among the food bloggers, who value his foodservice experience and potato expertise. He's shepherded some through their first food industry trade shows, and invited others to IPC harvest tours to learn more about Idaho spuds firsthand.

"IPC was one of the first food boards/brands to really embrace bloggers and give them a platform," said Sara O'Donnell, who blogs as Average Betty. "He's been such an amazing mentor to me. He's such a great listener and a great problem solver. And he just knows so many things about so many things."

Post-potato life

In retirement, Odiome hopes to keep his hand in the foodservice industry by continuing to post as Dr. Potato and visiting with French fry machine producers and fresh vegetable processors.

But Idaho potatoes will still play an important role in his life, even as a civilian. He's committed to indulging in baked Idaho potatoes and French fries as often as he can, and perhaps working his way through the 100-plus potato salad recipes on IdahoPotato.com.

"I dream about aligot mashed potatoes with lots of cream and butter and cheese," said Odiome.

Don's pearls of wisdom

"Foodservice is a 52-week-a-year pull for product. It may be harder to track [than retail], but when prices rise, it's still on the menu."

"Be a good listener [and] take advice, but then figure out a path

that fits your skills and helps grow the industry to the next level."

"Anyone who follows me on Facebook or Instagram has probably thought, 'I want that guy's job; he looks like he's having fun,' and that's true."

A funny thing happened . . .

Over the years, Don Odiome has seen his share of awkward spud situations:

- While demonstrating how to cut fresh-made French fries to a group of chefs in Atlanta, Odiome also ended up demonstrating the importance of making sure your tools are in working order: The fry-cutting machine hadn't been properly installed on the wooden wall studs in the kitchen, and it chose that day to crash to the floor.

- Diners and kitchen staff at a steakhouse got a free show one night when Odiome was enjoying a meal with an IPC commissioner. The commissioner wanted proof that the steakhouse actually used Idaho potatoes, so the waiter obliged by bringing out a full carton of the spuds and plunking it down on their table.

- At the annual National Restaurant Association gathering in Chicago one year, a show-goer cornered Odiome at the IPC's booth to complain about the short hairs he often found in his restaurant's French fries after they were cooked. Odiome had to explain that burlap strands from the bags in which No. 2 potatoes are packed can fry up to look like human hair—all the more reason he recommends making sure potatoes are washed really well before cooking.

WRITING HIS OWN TICKET

WESTERN FOODSERVICE REP ARMAND LOBATO

Like Idaho potatoes, words can be a powerful force for good in the world — at least when they're in the hands of Armand Lobato, the IPC's foodservice promotions director for the West.

Lobato believes in both spuds and good writing so much that he frequently contributes well-honed prose about produce to a variety of industry publications. He's a veritable fountain of information about everything produce related, from being an effective brand ambassador to controlling summer shrink.

"I've always had the writing bug since I was a teenager," said Lobato. "About 10 years ago or so, I pitched writing a retail produce column, and someone was crazy enough to let me try. I've done some other writing too as a columnist for my hometown newspaper, but produce is really my forte."

Lobato, a Colorado native, comes by his extensive knowledge of potatoes and produce honestly, after 40-plus years in the industry on both the retail and foodservice sides.

"I started out as a courtesy clerk in my neighborhood grocery store for an afternoon job when I was in high school," he said. "One day the produce supervisor walked through and asked me if I wanted to work in produce. I enjoyed it from day one."

Lobato logged 21 years in produce at King Soopers supermarket before switching to foodservice as a produce and dairy buyer for U.S. Foodservice in Englewood, CO. Later he worked as a produce buyer at Wild Oats Markets and helped open several Sunflower Farmers Markets.

In 2008, Lobato started a new chapter in his life at the IPC after finishing up his bachelor's degree in business management at the University of Phoenix. "I enjoy what I do for IPC, and I really love the people I work with," he said. "It's a job I love getting up and doing every day."

Lobato said one welcome change he's seen in the produce industry over the years is supply gaps being filled in. "Produce used to be much more seasonal," he said. "In the Idaho potato world, we've gone from being partly seasonal as well — there used to be a gap in availability in late summer. There are still peak seasons for certain commodities, but Idaho potatoes are year-round."

Lobato even got a chance to spread the word about Idaho potatoes to fellow students at the University of Denver, where he earned a master's degree in creative writing in 2014. As the only professional produce expert among his classmates, he didn't fit the stereotype of a traditional creative writing student. But he demonstrated his prowess at mixing potatoes with creative writing in a spud-specific rewrite of a familiar song:

"Peelings . . . nothing more than peelings . . ."

RETURNING TO HIS ROOTS

SOUTHEASTERN FOODSERVICE REP STANLEY TROUT

After making a full circle tour of the produce industry during the past 25 years, Stanley Trout has found himself back where he started: performing feats of promotional daring for vegetables he believes in.

Trout calls his job as foodservice promotions director for the Southeast for the Idaho Potato Commission, which he started in 2015, "really similar to my first job at the Tennessee Department of Agriculture."

Although he had graduated from Middle Tennessee University certified to teach agriculture and coach high school football, Trout soon realized that he wanted to do something different. He jumped at the chance to work as a marketing specialist promoting Tennessee-grown fruits and vegetables, even though he had never done anything like it before.

"They said, 'Go learn it,' so I did," he remembered. "I did locally grown and homegrown before it was cool!"

Trout's interest in agribusiness led him to a variety of other produce industry positions, including merchandising support, sales, business development and marketing for sweet corn, tomatoes, melons, pumpkins, onions and other vegetables. He managed some of the largest retail and foodservice accounts in the country and even logged time as a family farmer in Tennessee, although potatoes were never in his crop rotation ("too hot and the soil types weren't right").

"For years we grew Bell peppers for a processor and pumpkins for Halloween for roadside markets and corn mazes," said Trout. "It really gives you perspective when you have tough luck with the things you grow yourself. It helps you totally understand where the growers you represent are coming from."

Drawing on his wide range of produce experience from seed to plate, Trout said he has enjoyed the challenge of delving deeper into the foodservice side of the industry to promote Idaho's superior spuds.

"My career had been getting product in the front door of a company, and I never worried what became of it after that," he said. "Now I'm interacting with chefs and restaurants with questions like, 'Why are my French fries too dark?'"

Trout also values his wealth of long-term relationships

within the foodservice industry, reconnecting with many of his colleagues and friends at IPC trade show booths and while on account calls. But ultimately, he said it's the uniqueness of the produce industry that makes him glad he fell into it "by accident" at the Tennessee Department of Agriculture all those years ago.

He said, "People ask me, 'How was your week?' and I say, 'You wouldn't understand!' It's a much faster pace than most industries, and it's the truest form of supply and demand that I know of anywhere."

RIDING HIGH

NORTHEASTERN FOODSERVICE REP MATT BRIGOTTI

Hitting the streets of Canton, OH, while perched atop a giant potato wasn't in the job description when Matt Brigotti joined the Idaho Potato Commission in 2017. But he's already done it twice, when the IPC's Big Idaho Potato Truck comes to town for the Pro Football Hall of Fame parade, and he wouldn't have missed it for the world.

"I did the 'Queen of England wave' for hours on end, smiling at all the children," said Brigotti, the IPC's foodservice promotions director for the Northeast, whose wife, Samantha, also got in on the fun. "It was a blast."

Promoting Idaho potatoes to consumers, retail and foodservice with lighthearted campaigns is the IPC's stock-in-trade, and Brigotti sees it as the perfect strategy for the people-centered produce industry.

"Produce is very fast-paced and a very large business, but as you go through the years, you start to get to know everybody," he said. "The people are awesome, and it's a brotherhood. You're always trying to beat the clock with produce, getting it from the ground to the end user as fast as possible."

Brigotti launched his foodservice career more than 20 years ago as president of the New York Spaghetti House in Cleveland. He moved on to Sysco as a marketing associate, and then spent 11 years overseeing the McDonald's and US Foods accounts at produce giant Taylor Farms. Making the switch to promoting Idaho spuds was an easy transition, he said, since he's been able to make good use of his skills in front-line account management, operations, sales and service.

"My predecessor, Tod Schmidt, trained me, and he's typical of the old-time salty produce guy who gets up at 1 in the morning to get to work by 2 a.m.," he laughed. "Some of the [produce] terminals I go into are pretty rough and tumble, and the people there are a breed unto themselves. Each one is dynamic, and they have big personalities."

Getting to know the Idaho growers personally is an important part of the job too, he said, because it gives him firsthand knowledge of the growing and handling techniques that make the state's potatoes so special. "These are real people with real families. It's Americana agriculture at its finest," Brigotti said.

Sharing that Idaho potato story with his customers is the best part of the job so far, Brigotti added, "I go out and talk about potatoes, and I love it!"

