Downriver Chip Company Brings Bold, Authentic Flavors to Meijer

Nearly 20 years ago, Orfa Garza started selling homemade flour tortillas after co-workers at an auto supplier began asking to buy the tortillas she packed in her lunch. Her husband, Lito Garza Sr., believed the business could become something bigger.

"My dad was like, 'Let's get you a little storefront. Let's really give it a shot,'" says Orfa's oldest son, Lito Garza Jr. The family took out a home equity loan, bought equipment, and opened a small tortilla shop in Melvindale, Michigan.

What started as Orfa's dream soon became a family mission.

Lito Jr. left a career in civil engineering to help grow the family business. His younger sister, Karina Hecht, joined full-time after earning an accounting degree. She helps with everything from office work to helping with the chip production.

In 2013, the factory moved to a larger space in Rockwood, Michigan. As the company grew, the majority of the business was supplying chips and tortillas to the restaurant industry. Then the pandemic caused restaurant orders to drop. Forced to shift focus, the family began to co-pack tortilla chips for other brands. That's when they decided it was time to create a brand of their own.

"If we can do it for others," Karina says, "we should do it for ourselves."

They named it Downriver Chip Co. after the Downriver communities south of Detroit where they live, work, and manufacture their products.

"Downriver is not just the name that we gave it, but it's where we're from, where we manufacture, where we grew up," Karina said.

The hometown connection has resonated with customers. That same commitment to Michigan is evident in the way the family supports local schools and nonprofits and works with suppliers across the state.

For years, though, the Garzas had another goal.

Since the late 2000s, they had hoped to one day see their products on Meijer shelves.

"We've been chasing Meijer," Karina says. Her mother often said getting into Meijer "was going to be the ticket."

In 2024, Downriver Chip Co. earned a chance to sell its chips in 12 Meijer stores. Lito and Karina made deliveries before sunrise and filled the shelves themselves.

As sales increased, Meijer expanded the line into more stores. Meijer also helped connect the family with a distributor, making it easier to stock stores across Michigan.

Looking back, Lito says the company reached Meijer at the right time.

"Everything has a time frame when you're actually ready," he says. "We know how to make the chips now. The experience and everything got us to this point."

Colorful bags of Downriver tortilla chips in flavors including Sea Salt, Pico de Gallo, Chiloso and Guac now line Meijer shelves across the state.

Seeing their own brand on those shelves means more than selling chips.

"It just validated how hard we've worked and how far we've come," Karina says.

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