

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 114: Mapping One Neighborhood Trader Joe's, With A List.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: On this episode, we're checking the map of Trader Joe's number 507 in Nashua, New Hampshire.

Matt: Oh, you actually really don't need a map. I mean, it's pretty easy. You just take Route 3 south to the Spit Brook Road exit, then go left at Daniel Webster Highway, you'll see the Webster Square Mall and you'll see some restaurants and some stores, and you'll see Trader Joe's, 262 Daniel Webster Highway.

Tara: Actually, though, this map is of the *inside* of the store, and it comes along with some great ideas of what *you* might want to buy as you make your way through.

Matt: Of course, each and every Trader Joe's store is laid out a little differently. There is no company-dictated planogram.

Tara: However, I will say that this shopping list could be useful in your neighborhood Trader Joe's as well.

Matt: Alright then, let's go inside this Trader Joe's.

[Theme music begins with two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, director of words and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's.

Tara: Hey, Matt, I would like to introduce you and our listeners to Micah.

Matt: He constructed the map of our store in Nashua.

Tara: He absolutely did.

[Theme music ends. Upbeat music begins.]

Micah: I'm a construction manager. My focus is primarily on existing stores and remodels. So we are working in stores that are currently open.

Tara: So fixing stuff up, like maybe replacing floors or doing construction work while the store is actually operating.

Micah: Very much so.

Tara: That's a bigger challenge than building a new store that's empty. Different challenge.

Micah: It's a different challenge. I would joke with our directors of construction who focus on the new stores and let them know that sometimes our challenges might be a little bit more.
(laughs)

Tara: Yeah. We don't have to be competing. I sort of framed that wrong. They're different challenges, everything...you know. But you haven't always worked in construction.

Micah: No, I did work in facilities, also in real estate. From 1997 until 2020, I worked in the stores and ended my time as the captain of Brookline. Very busy store.

Tara: Well, when I reached out to you to ask you if you had any favorite Trader Joe's products to share or any favorite ways to prepare any products, you were definitely game. And now I'm looking across the table at you and there is what looks like a store map.

Micah: Yep. I have a store map for you.

Tara: With images and arrows.

Micah: When I get an email from Tara saying, "Hey, I want to talk to you about your favorite product or your favorite products," that's a tall order because, first of all, there have been so many products that I've really enjoyed over the last 30 years now. But what I thought would be kind of neat is if I could take you around my neighborhood store, which is Store 507, Nashua, New Hampshire.

Tara: Okay. All right, let's dig in. This is Micah's shopping list.

[Music transition.]

Micah: We've had so many different nut mixes, but I found one that I really enjoy, the Trader Joe's Olive & Herb Mixed Nuts.

Tara: Oh, yeah.

Micah: I love olives. I think it was maybe a Thanksgiving, let's try it out and get it on the table. And I have a bag of it in my house right now.

Tara: Okay.

Micah: So to me, it doesn't even matter the season. I really, really like this nut mix. To me, it's perfect. If you're just going to do charcuterie or you're going to set things out for a bunch of guests, I almost always put this one out and it's always a hit.

Tara: I like that because it feels like a little bit of a sleeper. People know about it. It sells well enough that it has remained on the shelf.

Micah: Mm-hmm.

Tara: But I don't think it's like a breakout star of the nuts and dried fruit section, but maybe it should be.

Micah: In my opinion, it should be. How many nut mixes out there have a dried olive?

Tara: Seriously.

Micah: I mean, it's unique and it really is tasty. If you like olives, I definitely recommend it.

Tara: Okay, excellent.

Micah: Newer item. Now, working a little bit further into the store, is our new Porridge Bread. It's so good.

Tara: I was perplexed by porridge bread as a concept because I wasn't aware of it when it came to the tasting panel. I was not perplexed the minute I took a bite of it.

Micah: Yeah.

Tara: And every time I've purchased it is as good as it was that day at the tasting panel.

Micah: It's moist. It's a little dense. It's definitely the kind of bread to me that you can put in and make toast and eat just one slice of, but you can also make a sandwich out of it. It's great. I would say that's in my rotation now. It's a daily item for me.

Tara: Okay, excellent.

Micah: I think we're getting into what some people might consider to be a boring item, but I have to go there. The twin pack of Sprouted Tofu is something I get almost every time I go to Trader Joe's.

Tara: Okay.

Micah: I like it because it's neutral.

Tara: Yeah.

Micah: If you're making something with tofu, you're generally cooking with a lot of different sauces and ingredients that you want to get on there. So to me, the fact that it has a very neutral flavor is a huge plus. The other thing I like about it is the twin pack.

Tara: Yes.

Micah: You can cut it, and half of it you put back in the fridge, and you only need to commit to using half of it and you know that second half is going to be fresh for you later.

Tara: So someone gave me a hack about cooking with tofu a few years ago because I'm not vegan or vegetarian, but I have come to really enjoy tofu...

Micah: Mm-hmm.

Tara: ...which my 20-year-old self is saying, "Really?" But yes, I have come to really enjoy tofu because as you said, it's all about the sauces and the seasonings. At the time I was stir-frying it and putting it into salads and other things like that. But the hack was: don't cut it,

tear it. If you're going to stir-fry it, you end up with way more surface area and craggy surface area that gets crunchier and true every single time.

Micah: It's definitely a good way to cook it, especially if you're not accustomed to eating tofu and you're maybe used to eating chicken, it's going to get a similar consistency for you. I love to air fry it.

Tara: Me too.

Micah: My kids honestly love it. We'll season it beforehand. You put it in the air fryer, it comes out. It's a little crispy on the outside and just right on the inside. But to me, the twin pack is the way to go.

Tara: Well, that's the one that I buy every single time.

Micah: It's convenient. You'd have to be cooking a lot of tofu to go through a whole block of tofu. So inevitably you're always end up putting some of it in a container and trying to store it for later, but to me, this just takes that piece out.

Tara: Fantastic. All right, where are we going next?

[Music transition.]

Micah: If you haven't picked up the tone of this, I am vegetarian. (laughs) So I'm going to one of my go-to lunch items and it's the Vegan Tikka Masala.

Tara: Okay.

Micah: I think all of our frozen Indian entrees are and have been fantastic for years. This item just tastes delicious. I think the sauce is great. I usually pair it with our Garlic Naan Bread, which would be next in line in our aisle. If you've never tried our Indian meals, you've got to give them a shot.

Tara: Truly.

Micah: Our Garlic Naan Bread to me is as good as going to a restaurant. I mean, it's that good.

Tara: Yeah.

Micah: To me, the Vegan Tikka Masala, it has a little bit of rice and a little bit of the meal. And so all together with one piece of naan bread, to me that's lunch or a meal or a dinner.

Tara: Trader Joe's is responsible for introducing so many people in this country to Indian food.

Micah: Yeah.

Tara: People who live in places where there are no Indian restaurants, where they would not have had access to try Indian food, but they see it in our freezer, and it might be \$4.00 or less. And it's like, "I'll give that a shot." People have said that's really good. And then suddenly they try it and they think, "I like Indian food." I love that about the freezer case at

Trader Joe's. There's flavors from all over the world. You might now think, I want to go to India. I want to try the real deal. I want to travel around the world and try new foods. I love this.

Micah: I agree 100% on our frozen aisle. And the challenge in having this conversation with you, Tara, was to really try and pick an item or two.

Tara: I know. I know.

Micah: Because truthfully, you could do an entire podcast just on our frozen entrees because there are so many of them.

Tara: So just to be clear, you didn't pick an item or two?

Micah: (laughs) Yeah, very much so.

Tara: (laughs) Just so we're clear about that. All right, let's keep going.

[Music transition.]

Micah: So I am actually shopping the store down this map right now. So I'm visualizing myself rounding the corner in my Nashua Trader Joe's. And the next item you're going to come up to is our snack aisle. And I'm definitely old-fashioned in this one, but to me, the standard plain Corn Dipper (chuckles) is still just my favorite chip that we sell. I love them. I like our elote and we have so many other great snacks, but my go-to any occasion, whether it's football games or even just a snack on the weekend, it's the Organic Corn Dippers that we sell. And we have sold these in some variation for as long as I can remember.

Tara: They got introduced sometime in the 2000s, in the early 2000s. What I like about them is they're similar to a branded product out in the world, but they're so much better...

Micah: So much better.

Tara: ...than that branded product. And the shape of them, you can use them as a little scoop. Sometimes I'll eat them as a spoon for chicken salad or egg salad or something like that. They're so crunchy. They have so much flavor in them.

Micah: Yeah. They're a little thicker, they're definitely a little heartier and definitely worth a try.

Tara: So there's a food truck in Southern California where you bring them a bag of chips and they cut it open and instead of making you a burrito, they just pile everything on top of your chips.

Micah: (laughs)

Tara: I can't remember what they call that, but they pile on whatever, the meat and the beans and the cheese and the rice and the guacamole on top of a giant bag of chips. It's kind of hilarious. People walk up and just hand them a chip bag; they cut it open. I've seen so many people walk up with a bag of our Organic Corn Chip Dippers and they'll walk away and they'll share with two or three people.

Micah: That'd be wild. I'd love to see that.

Tara: It's a crazy thing.

Micah: It would be absolutely a great bed for any kind of meal like that. It's delicious.

[Music transition.]

Tara: All right, you're in the snack aisle now.

Micah: In the snack aisle, kind of moving along. I'm hard-pressed to find a better value than our Pound Plus Chocolate Bar and our Dark Chocolate Bar. And we've carried this, again, for as long as I can remember, incredible chocolate. And it's a great price. I think you can buy a bar like this, break a few pieces off and have them as a snack and keep it in maybe one of our Silicone Bags (laughs) on the counter. But it's also, people are going to use this for recipes and baking and things like that. But to me, it's a snacker. My kids like it. The dark, the milk. We have a lot of great chocolate bars, but for as long as I can remember, this has been one of my favorites.

Tara: Okay. You have a good list.

[Music transition.]

Micah: We're rounding the corner. (laughs)

Tara: All right, let's keep going.

Micah: So a frozen item, and this is a newer item for us, newer meaning probably within the last couple of years. It's our Root Beer Float Ice Cream Bars coated with root beer and there's a vanilla ice cream in the middle.

Tara: Dessert on a stick.

Micah: It tastes like a root beer float. We'll watch a show together at night. My wife and I generally have some kind of frozen treat. Honorable mention would probably be the Mango Cream Bar, similar bar, but I love root beer floats and these taste great.

Tara: And there's just something fun and nostalgic about eating something off of a stick. I don't know why.

Micah: Yeah.

Tara: It makes you feel like a kid a little bit.

Micah: Yeah. I think it may be a little bit of portion control too for me. (laughs)

Tara: Yeah.

Micah: Again, a newer item in our grocery aisle, this is the original Caro Sugo.

Tara: Oh, such a good sauce.

Micah: This is definitely an elevated pasta sauce. You can tell right away when you open the jar, it's thicker. This is a really rich pasta sauce, and I use it for pasta dishes, pasta bakes, or even pizza at this point. To me, it's delicious.

Tara: There's been a lot of conversation out in the world, social media, about this sauce being a fantastic replacement for those very expensive, very high-end pasta sauces that are in grocery stores and club stores that may not be as good as they used to be due to various factors, but they're still as expensive or more as they've always been. For the price that we charge for this giant jar of pasta sauce and the quality, you said it's really rich and it is, but it doesn't have cream and it doesn't have extra ingredients. It's tomato sauce.

Micah: It's tomato sauce.

Tara: And the richness comes from the tomatoes. It's really good.

Micah: One of my favorite pasta sauces I think we've ever done, and we've had a lot over the last 30 years, but this is a really, really good pasta sauce and the price is fantastic.

Tara: Fully agree.

Micah: I'm definitely excited at our new limited Caro Sugo Cherry Tomato Pasta Sauce. It just came out as well. It's also delicious.

Tara: All right, let's keep going.

Micah: It's a newer item. For me, it's the Coconut Smoothie.

Tara: Oh, yeah.

Micah: I travel a lot to our stores. When you're on the go, sometimes I just need to grab a quick protein bar and something to go along with it. It is really good. If you like coconut, definitely worth a try.

Tara: I actually don't think I've had that one since the tasting panel.

Micah: Really?

Tara: Yeah. I will have to give it a try again.

Micah: The asterisk here is you have to like coconut, (laughs) and not everybody does.

Tara: Yeah. That's true. And that's just in the refrigerator near the Coconut Water.

Micah: Exactly. Yeah. It's a companion to our Coconut Water, which is also a great product.

Tara: Yeah, I like that one.

Micah: It's great. This one's just obviously it's a little bit thicker. If you're on the go and you just want to have a quick lunch, grab the bar, grab a Coconut Smoothie, and you're on to the next one.

Tara: Sounds like a plan.

[Music transition.]

Micah: The next item, I would call it the original Hummus where we took our inclusions and almost added them as a topping. So we have really a great selection of hummuses that fit that bill now. We have the Olive Hummus that we sell. You can actually see the olives on top of the hummus. The Crunchy Chili Onion Hummus, that is a great product as well. But to me, the original was the Mediterranean Hummus and I still grab it. If we have a weekend get-together with friends, this is coming home with me.

Tara: Yeah. Every time I host people at my house, I have this Hummus. Now my challenge is getting it out of the container and into a serving vessel.

Micah: To look the same.

Tara: And having it look that pretty, sometimes I throw decorum to the wind, and I leave it in the plastic tub.

Micah: I have absolutely found myself taking the plastic tub and maybe just putting it in a dish. (laughs)

Tara: You need to get a dish that's the right size. Yeah, that's probably the right way to do it. And I'm looking at your diagram of the store that you made and I'm thinking, and I haven't done this before, but I'm thinking that Hummus with the Garlic Naan from the freezer.

Micah: Delicious.

Tara: Rather than having pita, that Garlic Naan is so good. I bet it's really good with that Hummus, so I'm going to try that when I get home. That's a good plan.

Micah: It's so good.

[Music transition.]

Tara: I see the thing you were talking about...

Micah: Yep, we're there.

Tara: ...on your list.

Micah: So I'm going to start with the coffee. This is, again, another product we've carried for quite a while, and I actually was speaking with Rashida about it the other day.

Tara: Rashida is our category manager for coffee and tea.

Micah: It's our Ethiopian Coffee.

Tara: It's so good.

Micah: It's dark and rich, but it doesn't have heavy tannins or acidity, and it almost on its own is creamy.

Tara: Mm-hmm.

Micah: And I don't know how, it is absolutely my wife's and I favorite coffee that Trader Joe's sells. I have purchased it in its previous packaging, and I continue to purchase it in its current packaging. The quality has not changed at all. It's delicious.

Tara: I believe that Ethiopia is the place where coffee was first cultivated. It's kind of cool that one, the place where coffee was really first grown is still growing coffee, and two, that we have a coffee from this exact region.

Micah: We have a lot of different coffees that we sell. A lot of the small lots that we introduce are really great, but I think if you've never tried it, you've got to try this coffee.

Tara: Yeah, let's call out all the attributes. Organic, fair trade, shade-grown, medium-dark-roast Arabica beans.

Micah: Way, way back when we introduced this coffee, we had the farmers actually come into the store...

Tara: Wow.

Micah: ...and talk to us a little bit about shade-grown coffee and what that meant to them.

Tara: 2005 is when we introduced this coffee.

Micah: Yeah. There you go. There you go. Almost 20 years ago.

Tara: Twenty plus years ago. That's a long time.

Micah: Yeah. I pair that with our Coffee Filters.

Tara: Tell me why you like our Coffee Filters so much.

Micah: I feel like we've nailed the thickness of the paper perfectly. They're unbeached. They never tear. You can buy unbleached cone coffee filters elsewhere, but the quality is not there. The paper's thick enough. It's not too thick. It's great for any kind of pour over or if you have a drip machine.

Tara: We offer that product because most people making coffee are using some kind of a system where you need a filter. If people weren't buying it, it wouldn't stay on our shelves because we need that space for something else. It would never in a million years have occurred to me to talk about coffee filters when talking about favorite Trader Joe's products, and yet you make a really great case for it.

Micah: They leave no flavor when you brew your coffee. It's one of my favorite items we sell.

Tara: Really cool.

[Music transition.]

Tara: We're nearing the end here.

Micah: We have some really good dog treats.

Tara: We do.

Micah: The Beef Meatballs For Dogs are the perfect size. My son taught our little French bulldog how to catch using these freeze-dried meatballs for dogs. (laughs) We keep them in a little jar on our counter.

Tara: We have these in our dog pantry right now as well.

Micah: We have a lot of really great dog treats. And again, Kim, who buys for this department, does a lot of work to always try to introduce something new.

Tara: Yeah, they're great because you can give them as a treat. They're really easy to crumble on top of food. If you have a picky dog, you can sprinkle one of these on top. One of the things I love most about our pet section is the prices. If you go elsewhere and buy dog treats, they can be so expensive, like \$10.00 for a little bag of dog treats, and our pricing is really sharp.

Micah: All the time.

Tara: Yeah.

Micah: Frenchie's a little tiny dog, but he loves these things. And yeah, we do tend to kind of break them in half.

Tara: And my dogs are huge, so they're good for little dogs and big dogs.

Micah: They are. Two items to go.

Tara: Rounding corners, nearing the end.

Micah: This item got me to like sparkling water. This is a limited item, so I believe we carry this during the summer. It is the Pineapple Trader Joe's Sparkling Water. It tastes really good, and it absolutely broadened my horizons. I'm 51 years of age and I learned to like sparkling water because of this product. So you don't want sparkling water to taste like soda, but you want it to have a good flavor, especially if you're not drinking sparkling water on the regular. I would recommend this one and see if it maybe opens the door to all the other flavors that we carry.

Tara: Five or six years ago, we did not have any sparkling water in cans. We had a few bottles of sparkling water. We now have, I can't even count how many flavors we have on rotation in our sparkling water section in cans, in the eight packs of cans. I always have at least two of those eight packs in my fridge at home of varying flavors. I'm very partial to the Cranberry Clementine myself, which is an everyday flavor. I love that I can drink something that actually tastes like something and have zero calories and zero sugar, and it's not sweet like a soda, and it still tastes refreshing and doesn't actually make me thirsty like a soda does.

Micah: Yeah, it will quench your thirst like you're drinking water and it tastes great. I think that the Pineapple Sparkling Water we sell could turn just about anybody into a sparkling water fan.

Tara: Yeah. I know a lot of people who feel that way about the Cherry Vanilla one also.

[Music transition.]

Micah: The last item on my list, multiple different items, but I feel like it really is worth mentioning. It's our Trader Joe's Platinum Reserves and our Diamond Reserve wines that we sell, especially the limited releases that we sell during the holiday season. I, as a store captain, would encourage our customers to try these all the time. When you're buying a bottle of wine, generally people are going in and looking a lot of times for a label or a certain name, and they might not think their first bottle that they want to grab has a Trader Joe's name on it. This cancels that pretty quickly for a lot of customers when they realize how good the wine is that's inside these bottles. Holidays at my house always have these on the table. Every year our wine team does a fantastic job in sourcing new varieties and new types of wines. Ask your crew members what's new and what is Trader Joe's selling in these reserve wines? Because if you haven't had them before, they're just a fantastic value.

Tara: All the Reserve wines, the Reserve, the Grand Reserve, the Platinum Reserve, and then the Diamond Reserve, they're all limited in nature because we're buying from a vintage from a producer. The Platinum and especially the Diamond, they're really special. They're wines that might cost you two or three times as much if you bought them in that producer's brand label. We're buying everything that we can possibly get, generally speaking, from one of those vintages and putting it in our label. And so when we take out all those costs for transportation, for marketing, for advertising, for all of that stuff, and we just put it in our stores and let people discover, it really satisfies people's desire for high quality at a great price. And that's what we talk about as being value.

Micah: I think certainly on the West Coast where we've really been embedded for many, many, many years, our customers really understand these products. Some of them have been shopping with us for 50 years, right?

Tara: Yeah.

Micah: But as we grow in different markets, we opened our Newington, New Hampshire store, that's a whole new customer base, so they might not know what that value is.

Tara: This is a fun conversation. It is a walk through your neighborhood store. Anything else you want to add before we wrap up?

Micah: I do. There's a newer item that has been introduced to us...

Tara: (laughs) You can't stop yourself.

Micah: I can't stop myself. And it's relative to the coffee stuff again, I'm sorry, but if you haven't tried our Vanilla Cold Foam Creamer...

Tara: So good.

Micah: Yeah, I'll have black coffee all day long. But sometimes when you want to just sit down and enjoy a decadent cup of coffee, right? (laughs) Oh my gosh, it's so good.

Tara: It's so good.

Micah: You could cut off the drive-through, and you get to have this right in your house sitting on your deck. It's kind of nice.

Tara: And I'm going to take this roadmap with me and I'm sure we'll see you sometime soon.

Micah: See you soon.

[Music ends.]

Matt: Wait up. Do you make a right at the Pound Plus Bars or a left?

[Closing music begins.]

Matt: I need a copy of Micah's map.

Tara: Actually, we put a copy of the map in the show notes for this episode, so everyone should check it out.

Matt: And of course, if you need help finding a product at your Trader Joe's, you don't need a map. Just ask a crew member.

Tara: Hey, we're mapping out several more episodes of *Inside Trader Joe's* yet to come this year, so please hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It is free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.