

# The deep dish on Giordano's traveling man

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**T**o many in Chicagoland looking for deep dish pizza, **Giordano's** is a destination, but for one of its younger owners, the business is the means by which he travels to destinations around the world in search of spiritual enlightenment.

In the latest of his almost constant quests, Basil Apostolou, 27, went into the Amazonian jungles of Peru for a weeklong shamanic workshop where guests ingest a botanical concoction used by the indigenous peoples. Many who take the drug, which is illegal in this country, claim to have been cured of a wide spectrum of ailments.

He came away a changed man, he said.

"If somebody told me three months ago, 'You're going to be talking to spirits, man,' I would have thought, 'All right, hippie, go hug a tree.'" Apostolou said. "Now if there was a book about my life, in big, red bold letters it would say: JUNGLE! It's a defining point."

And he's inspired to keep adventuring.

"Work is what I do to fund my life," he said. "I don't work for a living. I work because I want to live."

Apostolou is the owner of Giordano's on Lake Street at Prudential Plaza. His father, John Apostolou, is the president of Giordano's Enterprises, Inc. Basil's brother George is the other heir apparent to the deep dish dynasty.

"Within seven years there will be a shift where my brother and I will have a few restaurants and my father will retire," said Basil, who plans to purchase another restaurant by the end of the year.

While George embraced the responsibility of ownership, Basil was initially reluctant.

"Everyone has rebellious issues, especially when you have an established family business," said George, 26, who owns Giordano's on Jackson. "I know when [Basil] was in college, he didn't want the restaurants. He went to school for something other than business: engineering. He traveled. He tried other things, stuff I wouldn't have the courage to do."

Basil Apostolou lived out of his car for three months. He camped alone in the desert.

tenment through isolated experiences," he said.

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"He's a traveling man," his brother said. "Journeys, yes. Shaman journeys, no. This was the first time he's done something as serious as Peru."

He was spurred by finalizing the contracts for his restaurant last July.

"It was a fear thing," Apostolou said. "I was signing the agreements to buy the restaurant from my dad, and I was going to be locked down: an adult. I thought, 'Is this the rest of my life?' Work, then home? I had to do something. I needed to do a big bang kind of thing.

"I finally realized, because I have the job that I have, it affords me the luxury to concentrate on this kind of thing," he said. "I'm my own boss, I make my own schedule, I make a decent amount of pay. Normally, people are too worried about the trivialities of life: going to the gym more often, quitting smoking, or any of the other things that can clog up your mind."

Gloria Iseli, 26, a clerk at New Wave Coffee in Logan Square, has been a friend for six years. She agrees that his career affords him freedom most people do not have.

"Giordano's is a tool in his life," she said. "It allows him to explore and become the person that he wants to be. I would love something like that that allows me the time and money to find myself. He's on a journey, and he's able to do it. A lot of us don't have that option."

Apostolou had read a personal account of the shamanic camp Blue Morpho just outside Iquitos, Peru, in a March 2006 issue of National Geographic Adventure magazine. The article was titled "Hell and Back." He concedes some of his friends were put off by the idea. "They were afraid for me. They thought I would get lost, killed or kidnapped for ransom," he said. "They thought I would catch AIDS from some crazy monkey."

Blue Morpho serves a brew called ayahuasca, which contains a powerful hallucinogen.

Apostolou took the plunge, paying \$2,190 for a 9-day sojourn at the camp. He arranged for his brother to look after his new restaurant and embarked on his New Age quest, arriving in early February at the secluded Blue Morpho campsite.

"It's like a monastery," he said. "There are no arches or paintings -- it's strictly wooded, hand-built huts -- but you get the feeling of being in a very holy place."

He and fellow campers fasted and took part in five ceremonies in a little more than a week. He helped prepare the ayahuasca brew and drank it under the supervision of Blue Morpho's master shamans and apprentices.

Days were spent recuperating from the nights, when for five to six hours, he succumbed to the hallucinatory effects of the drink. "It's like taking poison. It spiritually kills you. You're this minuscule thing and you can feel..." Apostolou said.

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He compares drinking ayahuasca to climbing Mt. Everest, although he has never done so. "It's this grueling experience. You feel better for having accomplished it," he said.

Before returning to Chicago on Feb. 20, he broke his fast with a celebratory feast in Iquitos, during which he ate traditional jungle cuisine.

"Alligator is very popular," he said. "We had majas, which is a three-foot jungle rodent. Basically, it's jungle rat. It was very loose, not gamy at all. Almost mushy. We also had turtle soup ... nothing I'd bring into the restaurant. People usually freak out if there's an entire turtle foot in their soup."

Apostolou is back at Giordano's, but already planning his next excursions overseas. He would like to mountain bike down the volcanoes of Hawaii and skydive in New Zealand. His father could not be reached for comment, but Apostolou described his reaction as one of futile acceptance.

"It baffles him. He asks, 'What's wrong with wearing a suit every day and going to work? What more do you need?' He's an old school guy. He wants to know why I'm not looking for a wife. I say, 'I've got plenty of time for that later. I've got to go to the jungle now. I've got to hit those trails!'"

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