

BUSINESSES: EDCO-sponsored event had a festive flair

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which provided some welcome shade. Some the Bend attendees rode the red Bend Trolley to Sisters and back.

Josie Johnson made her pitch for investors in her Josie's Best Gluten Free Mixes (see related story page 17). Attendees then heard company updates from two other Sisters business and a keynote from Samuel Pyke of Hill Shadows Pictures (see related story, this page).

Dan Stewart and Christine Funk shared the story of company founder and master luthier Preston Thompson who passed away in April. Six years ago Thompson was at an EDCO Pub Talk pitching for investors. He had no building, and was crafting guitars in his home.

In answer to his appeal, Craft3, a regional business that makes loans to businesses, families, and nonprofits in Oregon and Washington, and Mid-Oregon Credit Union stepped up and provided the loans that allowed Thompson to move into their present location on Main Avenue and hire artisans and craftspeople, which allowed Thompson to expand his business. They now have seven equity investors and a "woodshop on steroids," according to Stewart.

They recently completed a \$37,000 Masterpiece guitar, a special version of the usual \$17,000-\$23,000 Masterpiece. Regular Thompson guitars start at about \$4,000 and go up from there. They are handcrafted every step of the way by a nine-member crew who Stewart described as highly skilled, independent, and self-motivated. There are currently 60 guitars in production and 68 in the cue, waiting to get in the shop. Generally, a guitar will be in the cue for about five months, with production averaging four months.

A Thompson guitar is a



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Dan Stewart and Christine Funk shared the story of Preston Thompson Guitars at a gathering of business luminaries from across Central Oregon.

special instrument with the vintage sound of the 1930s Martin D28, the gold standard for sound. Peter Rowan, who will be in town for the 2019 Sisters Folk Festival, is one of Thompson's customers, as are a number of other well-known performers.

Inlay specialist Sima Haycraft has just been hired to join the team and they are currently looking for a set-up person.

Both Funk and Stewart issued multiple invitations to come for a visit and tour their workshop.

"Come and watch. It's a heck of a lot of fun," Stewart told the audience.

Jamie Eichman, chief operating officer for Laird Superfood, reported that the company is currently in a rapid growth phase since its founding in 2015 by the world-famous big-wave surfer Laird Hamilton. Sisters resident Paul Hodge, on vacation in Hawaii, met Hamilton and that's how they ended up in Sisters.

The company's motto is "Better Food Makes a Better World." What began as Hamilton's passion project to perfect his personal regimen grew into a dynamic, innovative brand with a mission to bring clean, simple, and thoughtfully formulated superfoods to the masses.

In 2018, the operation in Sisters had 37 employees. So far, in the first two quarters of 2019 they have hired an additional 34. Most of the jobs are middle-wage positions. They are currently recruiting for a controller, customer service rep, and a project manager. Their second building is complete and they have

purchased the rest of the land on Lundgren Mill Drive.

"We are here in Sisters to create full-time, middle-wage jobs. We're here to stay," Eichman said.

Laird Superfood products are currently in a number of grocery stores and in Costco in California and Hawaii. They are establishing distribution centers in a number of locations, with their first international center in Canada. They have started installing hot beverage machines in a number of public places like hotel lobbies and at 7-11.

The Laird product line is growing rapidly, with one new product a month coming on line, like the addition of new creamer flavors. The mushroom products contain four different strains of mushrooms that can boost immunity, increase focus, and improve cognitive function.

As one of the fastest growing companies in the natural-foods arena, Laird Superfood's offerings are environmentally sustainable, responsibly tested, and made with whole-food ingredients.

Josie's Best food is redefining gluten-free

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

At last week's EDCO Pub Talk, Sisters resident Josie Johnson, CEO and founder of Josie's Best Gluten Free Mixes, explained her mission of redefining gluten-free foods.

She stressed that her gluten-free baking mixes really do provide classic tastes and textures, rather than the usual cardboard quality so many people object to in gluten-free products. She is intent on providing overall great products, not just "good for gluten-free."

Johnson's current lineup of products includes a gluten free (GF) pancake mix, a GF waffle mix, GF crepe mix, and GF muffin-and-more flour. The products are available in five-pound (retail) and 25-pound (food service) packages and can be found at Market of Choice across Oregon, Food4Less, Newport Avenue Market and Melvin's, C.E. Lovejoy's, and Central Oregon Locavore. They can also be found online at www.josiesbestgf.com and Amazon.

Not only is Josie's Best gluten-free, it is also soy-free, nut-free, and GMO-free, which sets it apart from other gluten-free mixes.

The Original Pancake House in Bend is a loyal user of her products as well as

the Hyatt Hotel in Bellevue, Washington. Johnson reported that 90 percent of her food-service customers used Bob's Red Mill GF mixes before changing to Josie's. Bob's is their biggest competitor. All of their early success has been with Johnson as the only full-time employee.

Johnson's search for better GF products grew out of her own issues with gluten that showed up when she was in high school. She has been gluten-free for 20 years and she said that has changed her life.

According to Johnson, there are 32 million people in the U.S. who have food allergies, 5.6 million of them children under age 18. That means two children in every classroom are dealing with food allergies. In 2018, gluten-free was a \$17.5 billion industry and is forecast to increase 9.1 percent a year through 2025.

Currently in development is a just-add-water pancake mix and a chocolate chip cookie mix. In three years Johnson is aiming to have frozen and packaged GF foods on the market.

Her pitch was for board members who can offer advice and people able to provide mentorship as the business grows and diversifies. When asked what the Sisters community can do to help, Johnson answered, "Go out and buy our product and tell others about us."

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WHERE: Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church on the lawn under the tent

WHEN: Friday, August 9, 7PM

Cash and food donations welcome.
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