

Going National

BY URSULA EVANS-HERITAGE

Eugene's successful entrepreneurs distribute far and wide.

Eugene is known for many things. The culture in this mid-size town is famous for nourishing the talents of activists, runners, anarchists and meth addicts. One thing Eugene isn't known for is business. But with the rising popularity of locally made products like Nancy's Yogurt, Toby's Tofu Pate, and Yumm! Sauce, maybe it's time to consider adding entrepreneurs to the list. Of course these businesses all have their own unique Eugene flavor, so to speak.

Sometimes a Great Yogurt

The success of Springfield Creamery's Nancy's Yogurt is probably old news to many Eugene residents. The yogurt, which celebrates its 35th anniversary this year, reached national distribution five years ago. Viewing the palace-like exterior of Springfield Creamery today, one would hardly expect its humble beginnings. Chuck Kesey (yes, the brother of the late novelist Ken) and his wife Sue started by selling milk to other creameries and Springfield schools in 1960. Ten years later, the couple and their bookkeeper, Nancy Hamren, pioneered what would eventually become a very popular snack food: yogurt.

OK, so they weren't the first people to sell yogurt. But according to Sue, at that time "only bohemian type people bought it." Springfield Creamery was the first to put live acidophilus cultures in yogurt. Wait, but doesn't *everyone* put acidophilus in yogurt now? "In hindsight we probably should have patented it," said Sue.

Chuck first started learning about the veterinary benefits of acidophilus while studying dairy technology at Oregon State University. He thought perhaps the bacteria could be used to make healthy food for people. He was right. Sue says the company goal has always been to "make the best food at the best price and get it to as many people as possible." With distribution in all 50 states and 2004 sales of \$9.5 million, it seems they're on the right track.

Dreams of Tofu

The sterile building near I-105 in Springfield, headquarters for Toby's Family Foods, doesn't exactly catch the eye. But anyone who's ever tasted Toby's Tofu Pate, the company's star product, knows it's anything but ordinary.

The pate has a smooth consistency that makes it ideal for a dip or a spread. "It doesn't taste at all

like tofu, which is a good thing for people who don't like tofu," said Spencer Crawford, a 22-year-old landscape architecture major at the University of Oregon after sampling the product.

Toby Alves began experimenting with tofu because she wanted to raise her children as vegetarians and her son Olem was allergic to dairy, wheat and citrus. After awhile, Toby's Tofu Pate was born. Toby started bringing it to women's groups she attended in the early 1980s after her youngest child, Chelsea, was born. The women liked it and Toby began selling the pate in some of Eugene's natural foods stores.

Toby made it into an official business in 1984 when she formed Tofu Palace Products. More than two decades later the company, which was renamed Toby's Family Foods in 2004, is now distributing the pate regionally throughout Oregon, Washington, California,

Arizona, and Colorado.

Jonah Alves, Toby's son and president of the company, hopes the products sell as well elsewhere as they do locally. Even though the company is gaining success, he wants people to know that "We're still the same company. Our priorities haven't changed."

Yummmmmmy!

Mary Ann Beauchamp began experimenting with sauces in 1980, and opened her first café, Wild Rose Café and Deli, in 1991. Her trademark sauce became known as Yumm! Sauce, and she and husband Mark now own three Café Yumm!s in Eugene.

As its popularity has grown, so has distribution and you can now buy Yumm! Sauce in 25 grocery stores throughout Oregon. "It's addicting," said Anna Kelly, 19, a manager at Café Yumm! on Willamette Street. "Some customers walk in and you know exactly what they're going to order because they come in all the time."

The Beauchamps are working on a franchise package to expand their restaurants to Portland, Ashland and Bend sometime in late fall. Only Original Yumm! Sauce is used at the restaurants, but the company also sells Roasted Garlic and Smoky Chipotle varieties. Selling new products doesn't necessarily come easily. "If it's not blue cheese, mayo or mustard, people don't buy it because they don't know what it is," said Mark.

But someday, these Eugene products may just be household names. **EW**



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