

CAN-DO: UPDATES

KITCHEN
Incubator. Collaborator. Hub.

BY ANDREW DOMINO

Can-Do Kitchen provides commercial kitchen space, food business incubation, & workshops to entrepreneurs. For the following two businesses, Can-Do Kitchen played a part in their launch & continued success: DoughChicks & Season For a Reason. Read their stories below. For more info on Can-Do Kitchen, visit www.candokitchen.org.



SEASON FOR A REASON
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You can find a variety of foods at the Kalamazoo Farmer's Market—meat, vegetables & fresh-baked bread. One family's offering at the market goes with every part of the meal: Season For A Reason, what its creators call "salt with a kick."



"We first had it for pork chops, but now we spread it all over the place," said Alicia Clemens of Kalamazoo, who makes five different kinds of seasoning mixtures for sale at local farmer's markets and health food stores. "I can't eat eggs without it anymore."



Season For A Reason's flavors each put a different take a blend of sea salt, pepper, and garlic powder, from the basic "Delicious Dash" and "Gary's Classic" all the way up to the hot "Firey Flavor." Gary is Clemens' father, who concocted the seasoning several years ago for pork chops at home. After his death, Alicia and her brother Aaron, students at Western Michigan University, started trying to re-create the flavors.

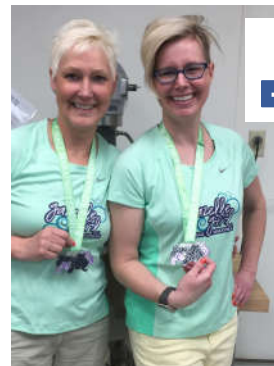
"He never wrote down the recipe," Clemens said. "We had to experiment to get it right."

They joined a startup business group at WMU, which led to the Can-Do Kitchen. That's where they learned about the marketing & business requirements of a small food company, and started networking with stores and other food-makers. They still use the Kitchen as a place to make up packages of seasoning.

Though Season For A Reason is a successful family affair — Alicia and Aaron's mother, Lori, helps sell and promote the seasoning — Clemens isn't ready to switch careers just yet. She is also a child care provider, and said that made her stand out at the WMU startup group, where everyone else was seeking a business degree.

Sales started in 2015, and Clemens said Season For A Reason is starting its market research, to find out which flavors sell best, and if they can make any tweaks to their product line. Already they have changed the labels on seasoning packages to make them easier to read.

She said the spices are all-natural & don't include preservatives, a philosophy Season For A Reason will stick with as the Clemens' continue selling their five seasoning packages.



DOUGHCHICKS
doughchicks.com
fb.com/doughchick



A Can-Do Kitchen veteran is still growing, and all without giving up on its goals. DoughChicks has been producing granola, energy bars & other snacks for almost a decade in Kalamazoo. Denise Steely founded the company with her daughter, Kara, in Wisconsin before moving to Michigan in 2008.



DoughChicks is known for its KaraComets energy cookie, MidNight Crunch chocolate granola and its newer SolComets breakfast cookies. They're snack bars packed with seeds, fruit and more than a few local or organic ingredients, like the Michigan honey and maple syrup in the orange cranberry cookies, or the organic carrots and raisins in the appropriately named carrot raisin breakfast cookies. The Steelys are both runners, and wanted to have an alternative to the available protein bars athletes often snack on before competition. Many of those bars have soy or gluten-based ingredients.



"I had a friend who had celiac disease (where people can't eat the gluten found in wheat or other grains), and I had never heard of it before," Steely said. "As I learned about it, I thought, there must be more people like that."

She said it was regarded as a fad at first, & even now locating gluten-free ingredients can be a challenge. While being completely gluten-free isn't the main marketing point of Dough Chicks, it's something that many customers are looking for.



"We don't put big signs out, but I know people want (to be gluten-free)," Steely said. "It's fun to say, yes, everything is gluten-free."

DoughChicks was an early part of the Can-Do Kitchen's roster of local food businesses, with Kara Steely making use of her culinary arts school training and the kitchen facilities and marketing knowledge of the Can-Do Kitchen staff. The Steelys are now "graduates" of the Kitchen, though they still rent space at the facility to make batches of DoughChicks products. Like other local food creators, they sell the Kalamazoo Farmers Market, other local farmers markets and at several health food stores in Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.



"It's steady year-round," Steely said. "Everybody wants to have healthy food."



You can see more of Andrew Domino's writing at www.dominowriting.com