



Marcia Blackwell, Blackwell's Organic Gelato & Sorbetto

Chocolate, vanilla, peanut butter, peanut butter chocolate swirl, blueberry, lemon, mango, orange, pineapple, raspberry, strawberry. Yummy! These are everybody's favorite flavors. And Blackwell's Organic offers these in cholesterol-free, dairy-free, vegan soy gelato and fruit sorbetto. But that's just the beginning of how Marcia (pronounced Mar-SEE-ah) Blackwell and her husband Tom are producing "a delicious dessert that is better for your body, your soul and the planet."

Marcia got into the business when Tom, who is lactose-intolerant, began making dairy-free frozen desserts at home. When she got laid off from her telecommunications job, they decided to open a business, but not just any type of business. As Marcia puts it, "We want to make a business that is sustainable in many ways." So they target independent gourmet and natural food retailers to distribute their product. They only use certified organic ingredients in all of their handcrafted desserts and buy what they can locally. They believe in paying a fair wage, not just the minimum wage, and having good working conditions with decent benefits. Plus, they only use what is called "fair trade certified" coffee and cocoa, which means that the product they buy has been produced by farmers who follow a set of standards for socially responsible production and trade, who have been paid a fair price for their product, and who are expected to invest part of that income in economic, environmental and social development of their areas.

This is a particularly tough agenda for a small company that is only about a year old. For example, many fair-trade certified products must be bought in tractor-trailer load quantities, far in excess of what their company needs. By joining NAWBO, Marcia hopes to swap information, tips, resources and support to help meet the challenges of running a small business.

Marcia and Tom certainly practice what they preach. "Everything we do is reduce, reuse, recycle," says Marcia. Even their Long Branch home is solar. And Marcia is also involved in community projects. For example, she is part of the community advisory panel formulated to work with NJ Natural Gas on the coal tar gas plant cleanup. She is also on the Long Branch Zoning Board of Adjustments. And Blackwell's Organic also donates product to nonprofit community groups such as the Lunch Break in Red Bank.

So what started out as a hunt for good-tasting frozen desserts for husband Tom has ended up as a mission for the Blackwell's. And the rest of us are reaping the delicious benefits!

(You can try Blackwell's Organic gelato and sorbetto by attending a product tasting event held at each new retail outlet. Their website www.blackwellsorganic.com lists dates and locations.)