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“Great Tasting, Earth-Friendly Products Build Second Career”

By: William L. Imhof

LIFE IS FULL of disappointments. Losing a job can be traumatic. However, by focusing on the future, staying alert to opportunities, and applying yourself to realizing them, you can come out better than ever. A case in point is Marcia Blackwell who, with her husband Tom, founded **Blackwell's Organic** in Red Bank to produce delicious organic dairy-free gelato and fruit sorbetto.

Tom is lactose intolerant. He enjoys cooking and experimenting in the kitchen and had developed a number of recipes for delicious soy-based gelatos and fruit sorbetto. Tom would make them for family occasions and they always received rave reviews. He was encouraged to consider starting a business, but never did.

When Marcia lost her job managing the New Jersey office of a telecommunications company, the Blackwells weren't sure what would happen. In working through the process of applying for unemployment, Marcia learned of the Department of Labor's "Self Employment Assistance Program." She applied to enter the program and was accepted. Her plan was to use the program, her personal experience in business and Tom's recipes to build a business. The result is **Blackwell's Organic**.

Blackwell's produces organic, vegan soy gelato and fruit sorbetto. Their products are certified organic by both the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). They contain no preservatives or extracts and the gelatos are cholesterol free.

Ingredients purchased from overseas, such as coffee and chocolate, are purchased on a "Fair Trade" basis. The Blackwells pay a premium price for each ingredient, which is passed on to the overseas growers to help them and their families prosper and improve their lives.

However, the primary characteristic of Blackwell's gelatos and sorbetto is flavor. Each variety has a full, delicious and natural flavor that can only come from the highest quality ingredients. "Each ingredient is a true food," Marcia says. The excellent quality of the products is why you'll find them in superior local retail outlets such as Delicious Orchards in Colt's Neck and Sickle's Market in Little Silver.

Blackwell's Organic evolved out of the Marcia and Tom's personal commitment to a way of life. As a family, they have always maintained an earth-friendly lifestyle. They believe strongly that we are stewards of this earth and have a responsibility to mankind to make it a better place. Their commitment is on the company website: *"It is not enough to do no harm. Each of us, individually and as a company, must strive to make the world a better place and inspire others to do the same. We believe we can make a difference and affect*

social and environmental change by how we live our lives and by how we run our business.”

Their home is the first solar home in Long Branch. Their personal menu has always been organic. Recycling and support to local causes has always been an integral part of their lives. Patronizing local growers, suppliers and retail outlets to support the local economy and minimizing the need for fossil fuels for delivery and their resulting emissions is a day-to-day family practice.

Starting a business to produce organic products is a long and difficult process. The proprietor must develop a business plan, find a site, arrange financing and establish the company as with any other business. However, as a producer of certified organic products many additional layers of complexity are added. The USDA must certify each and every ingredient. The ingredient must be certified organic and the supplier must be willing to provide quantities suitable to a startup operation at a price that can generate a profit.

Being certified as an organic provider, however, involves more than just ingredients. The entire production process, from beginning-to-end, must be certified organic, including: the manufacturing process, the cleaning agents used to maintain the plant as well as the storage, packaging and delivery procedures. Each of these hurdles had to be crossed so the public could be assured that Blackwell's organic gelato and sorbetto meet all requirements of an organic producer. Only then could they post the USDA Certified Organic label on their products and the company website. Startup took over a year, but all requirements were met and all certifications received. The Blackwells delivered their first products to local stores in January of this year, to rave reviews.

Customers must taste the products to really appreciate them. Knowing this, Marcia and Tom bypassed the usual advertising process. They have focused their efforts on getting customers to actually experience the product - concentrating on in store demonstrations and sampling at local markets in addition to participating in local fund raising events for organizations they support.

“Recent product tasting events were held at Whole Earth Center in Princeton and Health Fair in Little Silver. Fundraising events they have supported include those for Kaboom-Red Bank Fireworks.” Upcoming events include this Sunday's Earth Day Celebration of the Monmouth County Park System at the Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center in Howell and the fundraiser for The Center in Asbury Park to be held on Friday, May 5 at St. Anselm's Church in Wayside.

All the effort would be for naught if the products did not taste good and they aren't just good, they're truly outstanding. There are flavors to satisfy any taste and each product is made with wholesome, certified organic ingredients; no preservatives, no extracts, no artificial ingredients of any kind.

A major milestone was reached when Blackwell's Organic recently signed with a distributor who will deliver their products, starting next month, to retail stores from Southern Vermont to Pennsylvania.

Blackwell's Organic is dedicated to delivering products that are “Better for Your Body, Your Soul and The Planet.” The acceptance they have received has been sensational. Give them a try and you'll be sure to agree.