

Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce - August 2005

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Carlsbad Star... Russ Bruhn produces mouth-watering delicacies inspired by Carlsbad
By Erika Finch-McCaffrey

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Carlsbad Gourmet produces and distributes high-quality spreads, sauces, salad dressings and other delicacies made with Fresh Carlsbad strawberries. After placing the first jar of Strawberry Spread on the shelves at The Flower Fields in March 2004, Carlsbad Gourmet has expanded their line to over 20 different products including three award-winning items: Strawberry hot sauce, strawberry lilikoi spread and straw-banero spread.

Carlsbad Gourmet's strategy is to use local ingredients whenever possible in their products. Strawberry spreads are made with Carlsbad strawberries, micro-brew bar-b-que sauces are made with beer micro-brewed locally and the strawberry lavender spread and lavender jelly are made with dried lavender from The Lavender Fields in Valley Center.

Look for Carlsbad Gourmet products every Wednesday and Saturday at the Carlsbad Farmers' Market. Also, look for their line of products at markets and locations throughout Carlsbad and San Diego County. For more information about Carlsbad Gourmet or to order Carlsbad Gourmet Products, visit the website at www.carlsbadgourmet.com

Executive's name: Russ Bruhn

Title: Owner/President

Company name: Carlsbad Gourmet

Phone: (760) 730-3423

Web site: www.carlsbadgourmet.com

Founded: 2004

Prior experience: Seems like I've been an entrepreneur and marketer all my life. From designing and marketing toys, to ski industry products, to licensed NFL products, to brokering meat products, to medical and beauty products – one new venture has lead to another.

Source of starting capital: Self-funded

Average hours worked weekly: 70-80

Number of teammates: Five

Residence: Old Carlsbad

Family: Wife Lisa and two sons Tyler, 14, and Jordan, 12

Hobbies: I enjoy cooking, weight lifting, running on the beach, music, photography, coaching my son's sports, skiing and dirt biking.

What got you into this business? I was coaching my son Jordan's baseball team in July 2003 and they were playing against a team from Kauai, Hawaii. The players and coaches exchanged gifts with the Kauai team and the Hawaiians had brought gifts from the islands. They included macadamia nuts, Kauai Cookies, Papaya-Pineapple Jam along with other indigenous gifts from Hawaii. I wondered why Carlsbad didn't offer any branded line of local products and started thinking about what Carlsbad had to offer, and it didn't take long for me to figure it out. Strawberries!

What makes your business a standout? My recipes. Carlsbad Gourmet products are made with fresh Carlsbad strawberries and use less sugar. They are also available in unique flavors including strawberry-pomegranate, strawberry-black walnut, strawberry-pecan.....

Drawbacks to your line of business: The limited growing season of Carlsbad strawberries.

Why is your company located in Carlsbad? My products are made from fresh Carlsbad strawberries and I love living in this wonderful place we call home.

How do you plan to grow? Expand the product line. Here are a few products we are preparing to release later in the year: Strawberry honey mustard salad dressing, strawberry-lavender vinegar, strawberry balsamic vinaigrette, roasted strawberry salsa, strawberry ginger teriyaki glaze and possibly a strawberry blonde beer.

Toughest career decision: Setting aside some formulas I developed for the beauty industry to start up Carlsbad Gourmet.

Ongoing challenges: Keeping overhead to a minimum while growing the market share of the company.

Best way to stay competitive: Develop unique and great tasting products using local and fresh ingredients.

In five years, where would you like your business to be? I would like to see us selling product both nationally and internationally.

What does your company contribute to the Carlsbad community? We offer a high quality and unique product that is Carlsbad specific and represents our community through excellence. Also, we support Carlsbad community events by sponsoring or participating in events that fit our key markets.

What are your guiding principles? Believe in yourself and your ideas. Take the time to do the job right the first time; always conduct business in a friendly, respectful, and honest manner, but, most of all, TAKE ACTION!

What's one thing other people do not know about you? In 1997, I completed ski patrol and outdoor emergency technician training in Arizona but moved to California before the start of the ski season.

What would you change if you could do it all over again? Make more products the first year.

Choice for a second career: Develop products for the beauty industry.

People you look up to and why: My dad, always, and other self-made men like William Wrigley Jr. and Charles R. Walgreen, Sr.

Favorite movies: "Magnificent Seven," "Bullet" and "The Matrix"

Favorite quote: "A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing."-- George Bernard Shaw

Advice for new entrepreneurs: Believe in yourself. It takes time, dedication, and perseverance to make it happen. Always look for opportunities...they abound.