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Home-based coffee roasters want to keep business small

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James and Amy Enman, owners of Watergap Coffee Company near Mount Bethel. The aroma of roasting coffee drifts out every morning from their home-based business. "Our neighbors love us," said Amy.

Keith R. Stevenson/Pocono Record

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By **Wayne Witkowski**

For the Pocono Record

September 23, 2007

Right around the crack of dawn on most mornings, the smell of coffee wafts around the Ramblewood Drive neighborhood near Mount Bethel.

A cloud of smoke billows from the "summer kitchen" of the Enman residence, but residents know there's no need to worry — just another batch of coffee being roasted for the Watergap Coffee Company. And the Enmans say there are no complaints. Most people consider the aromatic smell a part of their day, and the Enmans say their neighbors seem to enjoy the rich fragrances from fresh beans picked in many countries around Central and South America and Africa. Some stop by for their orders.

"Our neighbors love us," said Amy Enman.

But plenty has been brewing aside from the coffee for the growing business since James and Amy Enman launched it in 2004 with a little under \$10,000 startup costs from the converted farmhouse they purchased five years ago. They've lived in the area for 12 years after moving from Flemington, N.J.

Selecting from an array of coffees shipped in 60-kilogram bags from distributors in Elizabeth and Newark, N.J., and Staten Island, N.Y., the Enmans feel their micro roastery is a fresh, affordable alternative to the mega franchises.

They've carried 62 varieties of beans, including five organic brands, and what Amy calls a virtually "unlimited" number of flavored coffees, which are a strong seller. Sales of whole bean versus ground coffee is about a 50/50, say the Enmans. Amy estimated customer satisfaction "around 98 percent. We asked for testimonials from our customers and got 50 the first night,"

They say that roughly 30 percent of their sales are the more expensive organic beans, "but by next year, we'll be up to 50 to 60 percent," said Amy, who said she looks for fully certified estate growers and distributors.

Along with local customers and area businesses such as the Village Bakery in Delaware Water Gap, the Enmans get a lot of business from offices that want a unique and practical gift alternative for employees or clients.

"We get a lot of business from community-supported agriculture groups," said Amy, referring to Trailhead CSA in Reeders and Cherry Valley CSA, which offers one-stop shopping for customers that want the freshest, most natural groceries.

ABOUT THE BUSINESS

Business: Watergap Coffee Co.

Owners: Amy and James Enman

Launched: 2004

Address: 415 Ramblewood Drive,
BangorPhone: (570) 897-6898; fax: (610)
588-3937

e-mail: amy@gapcoffee.com

Product: Coffee beans from three continents and flavored brands as well. There also are espressos and decafs.

Price: Ranging between \$7 and \$8.85, except for a 25 percent Kona Fancy Estate blend from Hawaii that costs \$17.50, and a Central American blend called "Organic Cascadia Cuadra Seal" that sells for \$10.20.

To order: Visit gapcoffee.com, or if you live in the area, call to request a delivery if it's at least two pounds. No orders taken on-site.

California. Some retail customers buy up to a dozen pounds a month.

They offer regular customers a "Coffee of the Month."

Amy lives a dairy farmer's schedule, rising before the sun and heading to the 15-by-18-foot roasting room to begin emptying green beans into the 25-pound Diedrich roaster.

"It gets really hot, which is why this is still in the window," said Amy, pointing to the air conditioner. "But in the winter, it makes it nice and warm in here."

Especially with temperatures in the roaster hovering around 400 degrees. The roaster has sensors to detect the bean temperature and ambient temperature of the roaster. Adjustments are made to airflow and temperature, a process that takes 12 to 13 minutes, as the beans increase in volume and decrease in weight, getting darker and aromatic. "Like popcorn," said James with a laugh.

Then, the beans are left to cure for a few hours before they are bagged or ground and bagged.

The result is a tasty bouquet of flavors to the discriminating coffee quaffer. Wine aficionados swirl, sniff, sip and spit, but coffee lovers follow the same steps, joked James, except they slurp, not sip.

"Coffee is like wine: Different regions have distinctive flavors," said James. "If the side of the tongue curls, there's acidity. You can tell the difference in the regions."

They've politely refused offers for taste challenges from festivals and entertainment events but may find the time to do that in the future.

It's especially tough with James traveling often for his job and Amy handling the business and homeschooling two of their three sons — Gary, 8, and Neil, 7, — and taking care of Drew, 3. James, his two older sons and two other family members also compete for Team Caffeine, sponsored by Watergap Coffee, on the dirt bike regional circuit and have done well in their respective age classes.

While many marchers throw out candy in the popular Halloween Parade in Bangor, the Enmans threw out small coffee gift bags.

"We'll throw them out from a float this year," said James. "The funny thing is the adults were racing for the bags ahead of the kids."

They've been networking with other roasters and exchanging ideas with them and at many conventions they've attended each year.

"I like to cook, and this process is like caramelizing onions," said James. "It's based on time, temperature and color. You want the beans rich, brown and beautiful. If you've taken too long, you wreck it."

James got the idea for the roastery working in sales for a company in nearby Roseto that sells packaging machines from Italy. "Italy has the best and most sold packaging machinery in the world," said James. "And they're sold to some of the top companies."

That includes Green Mountain and others that James had toured. "They had roasting machines grind up the beans, and I had fresh coffee, which was fantastic."

From there, James and Amy began thinking about starting up their own small-scale enterprise for the region. But they caution that they don't want to get unmanageably large like other self-starters such as Starbuck's, now a billion-dollar enterprise, and Green Mountain, which is worth \$380 million. "We're not going to go that big. We'll always be here," said James.

But James shared that he would like to open a coffee shop in the future, perhaps along the heavily trafficked Route 611 in the Tannersville area. Should that happen, the entire business might have to be moved to there, but he added that it would not happen for "at least a year or two," if at all.

It all began for the Enmans when James posted an ad on an online news group for a roasting machine and got a response from a man in Dallas who had a five-pound machine.

"It was great; he sold me the machine — a Diedrich — and even offered for me to come out and show me his roasting process. He even let me stay at his house," said James. "I roasted 14 hours a day for a week."

It didn't take long for the business to catch on, and James was back online looking for a bigger roasting machine. He found one in Toronto for a fraction of its cost at \$15,000 from a company looking to clear them out from a client that no longer needed them. "It cost almost half that to ship it here," said James.

"We were bagging so much coffee it was sheer pandemonium. But it was fantastic," said James enthusiastically.

He said the hardest part is juggling his regular job to take some of the burden of the business off Amy. Both said the business has gone smoothly.

"It was time management with growing pains and an increase in demand," said Amy. "But it's all flexible. We do this because we love to do it. There's no major drawback. It's something I truly enjoy doing."


"We'd get a call back from a guy who would say it is absolutely fantastic. We like to see when they come

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a smile on their faces," said Amy.

And she has her own favorite — Costa Rican El Conquistador. "It was our first bean, and I fell in love with it," she said.

James said he likes Indonesian Sumatran, "a real man's coffee" that has a touch of spice in it. Some brands actually carry a strawberry or other fruit essence in their flavor.

They also pulled out the exquisite Tanzanian peaberry, which is the smallest and perhaps most consistently flavored bean.

They also are impressed with the quality of the African brands.

"It's a fun industry to be in," said James.

HOME

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We switched from "store bought" to Watergap Coffee in the beginning of the year and yes, they are incredible. We are still "browsing", my favorite being the Tanzanian Peaberry for the time being but I never had a coffee from them I didn't like.

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