

NEBRASKA Development News

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A PERFECT BLEND: OSHKOSH, NEBRASKA RESIDENTS AND MARK FERRARI SPECIALTY COFFEES COMPANY EXECUTIVES PROUD OF THEIR ARTISAN ROASTED COFFEES



Cups of steaming Kona Coffee, Crème Brulee and Hazelnut Supreme (to name just a few flavors) are raised around Oshkosh in joyful thanks for the story of Scottsdale, Arizona resident and Oshkosh native son Mike Piva and Arizona-by-way-of-Hawaii transplant Mark Ferrari, whose business partnership led them to Oshkosh's main street. It was there in August '07 that Mark Ferrari Specialty Coffees started roasting and bagging its pure, blended, and flavored coffees.

Their 5,000-sq.-ft. building houses one of the world's finest roasting systems manufactured in Italy, an industrial grinder capable of grinding 500 lbs of fresh coffee per hour, a flavor mixer system (to blend flavored coffees), a weigh and fill (to dispense specified amounts of coffee), a conveyer sealer system, and pallets stacked high with burlap bags filled with green gold—(Arabica coffee beans) trucked in from Central and South America, Asia, Africa, and Kona beans direct from Ferrari's family coffee

plantation in Holualoa, Hawaii.

Ferrari, who earned his Roastmaster designation from one of Hawaii's most notable and foremost Master Coffee Roasters, skill-

fully roasts small batches of the high quality beans, which allows him full quality control. Depending on the type and style of coffee, beans may be 100% pure (as is the Ferrari Estate Kona coffee), or blended with

other Arabica beans and then roasted. The blended coffee beans are then either ground or left whole bean and bagged. Flavored coffees undergo an extra flavoring step after being ground.

In the seven months since it opened the Oshkosh facility and its seven employees have produced more than 110,000 lbs. of ground and whole bean coffees. The Nebraska facility has taken over the company's national and Canadian accounts.

The coffee is initially shipped to customer's distribution centers on both East and West coasts, in Nevada and Illinois, and then sold in grocery, department, gift and



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specialty stores throughout the U.S. and Canada, selected Häagen-Daz® Ice Cream Shops in Arizona and California, and select Costco stores. Currently, the only Nebraska retail location that sells the coffees is Budaroo's Florist in Oshkosh, which does a brisk business.

"Amazingly, they've sold numbers comparatively to some of our busier stores in the Scottsdale, Ariz. area," said Piva.

"It opened my eyes to not only how very happy and proud the community is that it's produced here in town, but how fully supportive they are of

Mark and me locating our company here."

All Ferrari coffees come in striking black bags covered with bright yellow coffee beans and vines and catchy wording that literally grabs peoples' attention in stores. The company also produces "private label" coffees for other coffee companies.

"We really haven't gone out and advertised [since] we've gotten tremendous feedback from our coffees' placement in stores. We've had major companies and media contact us [because they're] intrigued by the bag and all the information [on it]," said Piva. "Several weeks ago, we were con-

tacted by one of the largest corporations in the world [after] they spotted our bags [in a Scottsdale grocery store]. They bought one bag of each style [coffee] and now they want to do business with us."

With the company's rapid growth came the realization that they needed to move into a larger facility and soon.

"I remember bringing up the Oshkosh idea to Mark



and he said 'Man, it isn't easy to get there—logistics and expense,' so we continued to look at buildings [in the Phoenix area] and we needed

to be taking the next step," Piva said. "Buildings here in Phoenix are so expensive and they were basically empty—I wasn't ready to take that on. The risk was lower in Nebraska. I knew people we could hire to contract the work done and to work for us."

Another concern was the costs of shipping green coffee to Nebraska compared with Arizona but the two discovered there wasn't a significant cost difference.

"We buy farm direct and also use a broker so we know who we're dealing with, either they're family-owned, or represent the families who own it," Piva said. "We want to make

sure they're good to the environment and to their workers too."

Piva finally convinced Ferrari to at least consider Oshkosh and allow him to make the trip to meet with people who could help make it happen.

"I remember when I first met with the [Oshkosh] economic development group and they were so excited. The more you talked about what you wanted to see happen, the more people caught onto it and things

started building and making more and more sense," Piva said. "Local government leaders, the business community and Garden County residents have been very supportive and generous with their time to stop and introduce themselves to Mark, and it's funny the more we went back and forth, the trip seemed to go more quickly."

They received loans from the Panhandle Area Development District, Oshkosh Economic Development, and a JOBS (Joint Opportunities for Building Success) grant through Lisco State Bank. Currently, they are in the process of applying for a loan through the Nebraska Rural Advantage.

"We own our 5,000-sq.-ft. facility and all of our equipment and have the capacity to grow within the adjacent lot that we also own. We're going to have the building

and equipment paid off so much quicker here than we would have in metro Phoenix," Piva said. "We made all efforts to infuse more than \$90,000 directly into the community by hiring and enlisting local businesses and contractors to refit our production facility".

The homecoming has been especially meaningful for Piva. After attending Kearney State College he moved to Scottsdale in 1986 and became a solutions analyst with Nationwide

Insurance Company. Yet he always came "home" to Oshkosh. While his brother lives in California and sister in Minnesota, and even though he'd lived in Arizona for 20 years, people still greeted him like he'd never left. His father still lives there and regularly stops to 'check up on everyone' at the plant.

How Piva and Ferrari met and became business partners is a fascinating story in itself and good for at least another cuppa joe in its telling.

Piva, Ferrari and Ferrari's sister seemed to keep showing up in the same social circles, and in turn, became fast friends. Ferrari, who with his sister started up and ran Hawaiian Mountain Gold Coffee Company in 1986 in Holualoa, Hawaii, left the thriving business so he could explore other ventures on



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the mainland. An invitation to visit the Ferrari family coffee and macadamia nut "farm" in Hawaii in 1997 proved not only transformative for Piva, who became fascinated with the coffee industry, but re-ignited Ferrari's interest in coffee production.

"They said 'Come visit us on the farm.' I grew up on a farm and know about farms, so I actually went over there for about three weeks. We got there so late that I couldn't see much beyond the winding

drive up to their home. His family lives on a side of a mountain and the coffee plantation surrounds it, but you don't know it's a coffee plantation because it's all under the canopy of a jungle," Piva said. "The first morning I woke up in this bedroom that opened up onto a large veranda with an ocean view of yachts. I said 'This is NO farm!'"

The two partnered to initially expand the Hawaiian Mountain Gold coffee brand into markets throughout the U.S. and Canada. In 2003, they established Mark Ferrari Specialty Coffees, a coffee roaster, wholesaler and distributor. Piva continued to work both at Nationwide Insurance, and at Mark Ferrari Coffees, where he, as vice president, handled daily accounting and assisted with local and national promotions until January 2008 when he finally felt he was in a position to devote himself 100 percent to Ferrari Specialty Coffees.

"In a time when many businesses choose to leave rural America, we chose the contrary," Piva said.

"We've been very pleased with the skills, talent, and craftsmanship in Garden County. It's great to be home again!"

What's on the horizon for Mark Ferrari Specialty Coffees? The company has plans to open its own retail store this summer! Along with freshly bagged coffees available to

the public, the company will also offer fresh brewed coffees, selected baked goods and gift items. Keep your eyes peeled to area media as to

their progress and estimated grand opening date!

For information, call 602-799-5921, or email: mikepiva@cox.net, or visit their Web site: www.markferraricoffee.com



Many adjectives used to describe wine are also used to describe coffees and coffee blends.

"When you're 'cupping' coffee, you're taste testing. You 'cup' after each roast because similar to grape crops and wine production, your different coffee bean crops take on aspects of where it was raised, for example, whether it went through a dry season or rainy season, etc."

-Mike Piva

A sampling of other terms includes:

- **Acidity**—The first flavor impression of a coffee.
- **Arabica**—Considered superior, Arabica beans are High Grown (HG—2,000-4,000 feet above sea level) or Strictly High Grown (SHG—4,000+ feet above sea level) in the mountains and make up about 70 percent of world coffee production.
- **Brightness**—Coffee's crisp, first flavor impression.
- **Chocolaty**—Flavor is reminiscent of rich, sweet chocolate.
- **Earthy**—Flavor that brings to mind clean, fresh-turned earth.
- **Finish**—Aftertaste that remains when coffee is swallowed.
- **Fruity**—Aroma or flavor reminiscent of fruit, typically cherries and berries.
- **Wild**—Coffee that is extremely fruity flavored.
- **Winey**—Full-bodied coffee with distinctive dry, tangy acidity similar to a fine red wine.