

Bear Naked co-founder switches gears from granola to frozen burritos

Posted on 02/01/2010

NORWALK

By CHRIS BOSAK
Hour Staff Writer

One of the founders of granola and cereal company Bear Naked is back in the food business -- this time with frozen burritos.

Brendan Synnott has launched EVOL Burritos, a company devoted to natural foods, as well as sustainable and humanely raised beef and pork, and free-range chicken and cage-free eggs. Synnott was at Stew Leonard's in Norwalk on Monday, passing out free samples and talking with customers about the brand.

EVOL team members will be back at Stew Leonard's from Thursday through Sunday, giving out samples, freebies and prizes, such as ski passes to Okemo Mountain.

"When I sold it (Bear Naked), it was bittersweet. The brand and products were an extension of myself. I have a real passion for natural foods," said Synnott, who has based the new company in Boulder, Colo. "I can only work on something that I believe in from head to toe."

It was fitting that Synnott turned to Stew Leonard's to help launch the product locally. He credits Stew Leonard's with helping to launch Bear Naked, a company



Evol Burritos partner Brendan Synnott hands out stickers and samples of his new Burritos to shoppers at Stew Leonards in Norwalk. Photo/Alex von Kleydorff.

he founded in his native hometown of Darien with friend Kelly Flatley. They moved their headquarters to Norwalk in 2006 and sold the company to Kashi, a subsidiary of the Kellogg Company, for a reported \$122 million in 2007.

Stew Leonard's was the first major grocery store to carry Bear Naked products.

"Stew Leonard's taught me how to put the customer at the forefront of every brand you make," Synnott said. "Make every decision as if the customer were sitting right next to you. We don't own the brand. Our customers own the brand."

"Also, Stew's just gets it from a food standpoint."

For every burrito sold at Stew Leonard's during the promotion, EVOL will make a donation to the Stew Leonard's III Children's Charities Foundation.

The burritos come in five varieties: shredded chicken, shredded beef, veggie fajita, basic bean & cheese, and breakfast skillet. Synnott said the company plans to launch gluten-free burritos later this year.

"It's the first healthy lifestyle product you'd be proud of being around the frozen food section," Synnott said. "Frozen food gets a bad rap. But, at the end of the day, it's one of the better ways to preserve food. You're simply going right to the freezer."

Seven employees from Bear Naked are currently on board with Synnott at EVOL Burritos, which is a joint venture with Phil Anson of Phil's Fresh Foods. Tom Spier, former CFO at Bear Naked, and Chris Mears, Bear Naked's first employee, are currently with EVOL Burrito.

Bear Naked spawned another food company last year as Yum Nuts, a maker of gourmet cashews, launched in Norwalk. Two of the three founders previously worked at Bear Naked. Yum Nuts also had a sample booth set up Monday at Stew's.

"I'm a fan of this guy," said Yum Nuts co-founder Jérôme Metivier, pointing to Synnott. "He's got a great product. He's all about the food."

Synnott said the name EVOL comes from spelling love backwards.

"It's making the customer the star of the brand," he said. "When you look at it in the mirror it says LOVE and you can believe in yourself and the product. I'm proud to inspire people to live an active lifestyle."

Aside from natural foods, an active lifestyle is something else about which Synnott is passionate.

After selling Bear Naked, Synnott was one of the participants in the reality show Survivor, taking part in Survivor: Tocantins.

He also founded the nonprofit organization First Descents (www.firstdescents.org), which offers free outdoor adventure therapy for adults with cancer.