

WEEKLIES > HOMECOMPANION

Little Duck Organics is filling a big 'bite size' niche

By **AMANDA BOROZINSKI**
Companion Staff

Published:
Friday, January 8, 2010 8:00 AM EST

JAFFREY — In the 2005 animated film "Robots," the industrial inventor Bigweld lives by one motto: "See a need. Fill a need."

Zak Normandin of Jaffrey has made that motto a reality.

Normandin created his company, Little Duck Organics, just one year ago. Today, the company's first product line, USDA certified organic bite sized, freeze dried pieces of fruit, can be found in seven stores throughout New Hampshire.

"After working on this intensely, it's a great feeling to finally have the product out there in stores," Normandin said. "It's very validating."

You could say Little Duck Organics began in the food aisle," laughed Normandin's wife, Kathleen.

Three years ago, after his first daughter Taylee was born, Normandin found himself scouring the baby aisle looking for something that he said just wasn't there: healthy, organic baby snacks.

"All the products we saw had added chemicals and sugars," Kathleen said. "We wanted to feed our children something pure."

Last year, after his daughter Ella was born, the seeds of an idea took root.

"(Zak) has always had an entrepreneurial mind," Kathleen said. "And since we had just had children his mind was on creating something for kids."

Together the couple began researching existing products. Based on what they found, the couple decided to start with one ounce, re sealable pouches of freeze dried snacks.

"We wanted something healthy and easy for busy parents," Kathleen said. "And, the great thing is when you freeze dry fruit it doesn't lose any nutrients."

After sending samples to their friends and family, the couple concocted three pairings of freeze dried fruits: apple and banana; blueberry and apple; and strawberry and mango.

Normandin came up with a name — Little Duck Organics LLC — and designed the new company's packaging and Web site.

"We wanted something cute and recognizable. A name that wasn't already out there but was simple and easy to remember," he said.

After the Web site was up and running, Normandin began contacting stores and sending out samples.

In response, stores including Coll's Farm in Jaffrey, Harvest Market in Bedford, and Nature's Green Grocer in Peterborough began placing orders.

The Normandins did not take out any loans from the bank. Instead, they used their savings — and what they called "a lot of sweat equity" — to get the company up and running.

"He literally only gets four or five hours of sleep every night," Kathleen said.

One day last October The Little Duck Organics Web site was picked up by some mothering blogs — and within 13 hours Kathleen and Zak had received 30,000 requests for free samples.

"It was like we were getting one request every second," Kathleen said.

Normandin quickly removed the free sample button from his Web site and apologized to all those who had requested samples.

"We plan to get samples out to everyone who requested them, but at this point its just not feasible," Kathleen said. "We are trying to send a few of the samples out at a time."

For Zak, the inundations of free sample requests simply solidified what he already knew.

"It's a little scary to spend your own money to start a business and not know if people are going to go for it," he said. "But in the end I keep coming back to our product. We have a great product."

As for the future, Normandin hopes to get Little Duck Organics snacks in as many stores as possible. Then he will begin what he calls "phase two" of the operations: larger bite size snack pieces for toddlers and older children.

On the Web:

www.littleduckorganics.com



Taylee Normandin tries a taste of Little Duck Organics, organic freeze dried pieces of fruit developed by her father, Zak Normandin of Jaffrey.