



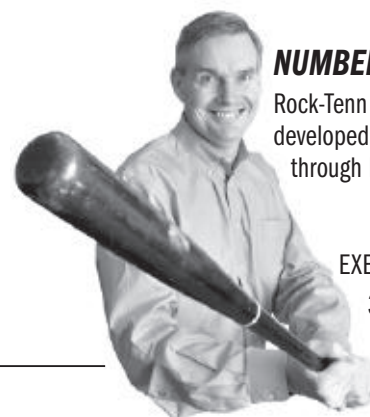
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First steps

Mom entrepreneurs hit sweet spot with organic baby food

By Thornton Kennedy
STRATEGIES EDITOR

It never occurred to Heather Schoenrock that the food she made at home for her baby could be a money-maker.

She was raised on homemade baby food; after all, her mother pureed fresh fruits and vegetables for her meals. Generations of her family were raised on homemade baby food.

The demand was there, Schoenrock knew. It started with her friend Connie Pope, who after seeing Schoenrock feeding her baby, Jack, asked Schoenrock to make a batch for which she would gladly pay. Wherever she was feeding her children, people would ask Schoenrock about the food she kept in small Ziploc bags. Schoenrock, who Pope describes as her "Martha Stewart friend," offered to teach people how to make it themselves, but she found that moms didn't want to make baby food, but they were more than willing to pay for it.

It wasn't until Pope presented Schoenrock with a manifesto arguing the food she had been making since her youngest daughter, Lucy, now 10, was a baby could, and should, be sold in stores.

"It didn't take a lot of thought," said Schoenrock. "I thought, 'This would be fun.' I wasn't sure it would become anything."

But it did. Named for Schoenrock's youngest child, **Jack's**

Jack's Harvest LLC

Founded: January 2008

Owners: Heather Schoenrock and Connie Pope

No. of employees: 3

Revenue: Less than \$500,000

In the two years since starting out, Jack's Harvest organic baby food has landed on the shelves of Whole Foods, Fresh Fare by Kroger, and Greenlife Grocery while revenue has doubled.

Harvest LLC

launched in January of 2008. The organic baby food is available in 18 retail locations, including 12 Whole Foods Markets in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and the Carolinas. Revenues have doubled and the company is about to launch new packaging and add flavors.

Jack's Harvest

has found a sweet spot in a growing market that is hitting its stride despite the souring economy. According to the **Organic Trade Association**, organic food sales grew by 15.8 percent to reach \$22.9 billion in the U.S. in 2008. Organic foods account for 3.5 percent of all food product sales in the U.S., according to the survey, which was conducted by **Lieberman Research Group** on behalf of the Association.

"Organic products represent value to consumers, who have shown continued resilience in seeking out these products," said Christine Bushway, the Organic Trade Association's executive director.

Jack's Harvest is certified USDA organic through the **Georgia Crop Improvement Association's Organic Certification Program**

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Good food: Heather Schoenrock, left, and Connie Pope have a hit on their hands with Jack's Harvest organic baby food, which is available throughout the Southeast.

First steps

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and contains no preservatives, artificial flavors or colors, salt, sugar or fillers. Schoenrock and Pope buy their vegetables through **Destiny Organics**, and Schoenrock selects local produce first. Jack's Harvest currently offers 10 flavors, ranging from Butternut Squash-ed Apple to Tango with Mango. The food is prepared in a 2,000-square-foot kitchen in Roswell, and frozen in small bags.

Research and development

Pope approached Schoenrock about forming a company in late 2007, with Pope handling sales and marketing and Schoenrock in charge of the kitchen. The two took a year for preparation, testing flavors and getting all of the certifications, licenses and insurance.

One of the benefits of having interest in the product before the company actually started was Jack's Harvest was able to go through the toughest market testing possible without spending a tremendous amount of money, Pope said.

Anytime a mom would ask, Schoenrock and Pope would send them samples, asking only for feedback in return. This became their test kitchen.

"We would deliver the food to moms, and they would say, 'I am about to feed them.' They would invite us into their kitchens," said Pope. "We have always had this sense of community with parents."

They used this method to test out flavors and learn which foods children liked and disliked and whether they needed to tweak a recipe.

Jack's Harvest started out on the Internet, but Schoenrock and Pope always had a plan to go into brick-and-mortar retail locations. Through networking and



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cold calling, they got Jack's Harvest in Six Beans, a ready-to-eat health food takeout store; Nuts 'N Berries Natural Food Stores; and other small retailers.

One of the first businesses Jack's Harvest partnered with was Play 2 Grow, a young childhood development center off of Howell Mill Road run by pediatric therapist Marc Castelo.

"The product is really fresh," said Castelo. "[Moms] don't like the food off the shelf. It's been sitting out there for a while. The shelf life for those foods is a few months and in some cases it has been out there for a year."

More importantly for Castelo is the impact that organic fruits and vegetables have on a developing immune system.

"It's an investment," he said. "The money you spend you can recoup that on your health."

The real breakthrough for Jack's Harvest came in the summer of 2008 after they attended a Whole Foods vendor fair.

"People kept saying, 'You have to try the

baby food,'" said Pope.

Jack's Harvest came to the attention of Vince Griesman, South region grocery coordinator for Whole Foods Market, who told Schoenrock and Pope, "Let's talk about what we need to do to get you on the shelves," Pope said.

Schoenrock called him the next morning, and Jack's Harvest went through the process of coding, labeling, certification, all of the ins and outs of getting food on the shelves of a major grocery store. Schoenrock and Pope spent Labor Day of that year stocking the shelves of Whole Foods with Jack's Harvest.

"Getting into Whole Foods was the beginning of us going to the next level," said Pope. "Our volume dramatically increased, we were able to buy in bulk and improve our margins."

Family first

Schoenrock and Pope are entrepreneurs, having built a successful business out of a

love of healthy food for their children. But the two are moms first.

A trip to show a reporter the kitchen was interrupted because Pope had to pick up Schoenrock's children. A phone interview with Schoenrock was threatened because the physical education teacher at her children's school frowns upon cell phones during carpool. Their duties as mothers come first, which is why Jack's Harvest works; it allows them the flexibility. But it also takes a lot of work and a lot of juggling.

Both are married. Schoenrock is the mother of two girls and Jack, who is now 3 and still love Jack's Harvest food. Pope is mother to Kathryn and Avery. Avery and Jack were born a few months apart. Schoenrock and Pope both hold college degrees, Schoenrock from The University of Georgia and Pope from Florida State University.

Jack's Harvest will have a busy year. The package redesign and new flavors are first and foremost on their plates, but looking a little further afield, they hope to continue their expansion in the Southeast and eventually go national.

Reach Kennedy at thorntonkennedy@bizjournals.com.

COMING SOON

IN THE ZONE

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HIGHER ROAD

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END OF THE YEAR

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"A positive effect on our staff throughout the year"

In 2006, the Nalley Automotive Group had the good fortune of receiving the award for Atlanta Business Chronicle's Best Places to Work (large company category). We never would have imagined the positive effect it would have on our staff throughout the year. The award is not only a testament to our company's work ethic, but the best part was that our amazing employees wanted to tell everyone in Atlanta how much they love their jobs. We truly see the award as a huge honor and we're proud to proclaim it!

Henry Day
President/CEO
Nalley Automotive Group



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Nominations for top innovations sought

A salute to the best innovations in marketing by Georgia companies, nominations are being accepted for the annual Marketing Award for Excellence, or MAX awards.

Presented by **Georgia State University's** J. Mack Robinson College of Business Department of Marketing and Atlanta Business Chronicle, these awards recognize and honor innovations in marketing. Additionally, this year's MAX Awards will honor the best innovation from the past decade. Former MAX Award winners are nominated automatically, and the winner will be selected on the degree of innovation, long-term success and impact within the industry.

To be eligible for entry, nominations must be for innovative new products,

Entry forms may be obtained the following ways:

- ▶ Visit www.maxawards.com to download an entry form
- ▶ Call (404) 413-7690 to request an entry form
- ▶ E-mail maxawards@gsu.edu to request an entry form

new services or new ways to market that have been developed and/or launched by Georgia-based companies or divisions during 2009.

Georgia State University's Marketing RoundTable, made up of senior marketing executives from top Atlanta companies, will serve as judges for the awards.

A grand winner, winners and finalists will be announced at the MAX Awards breakfast in February.

Idbids LLC, which makes toys aimed at educating children on environmental sustainability and responsibility, was named the 2009 Grand Winner.

Idbids joined a long list featuring the best of the best in innovative marketing from Georgia companies.

Entries must be submitted by Thursday, Dec. 10, 2009. Winners will be announced during the 18th Annual MAX Awards breakfast event on Friday, Feb. 26, 2010, at the Georgia Aquarium.

CONTACT

Are you looking to rebound in 2010?

Tell us about it.



THE EDITOR **THORNTON KENNEDY**
(404) 249-1059 thorntonkennedy@bizjournals.com