

BELOIT FIRM'S TASTES SWEEP STATE FAIR AWARDS

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Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News (From left): Beepa's owner and master of recipes Justin Fjalstad; owner and accountant/bookkeeper Andrea Fjalstad; owner and head of sales, marketing and business functions Roger Turner; and kitchen manager Brenda Mahlum gather for a photo. Beepa's won several awards for its products at the Wisconsin State Fair on Thursday.

BELOIT - The folks at Beepa's, 1205 Madison Road, are not only creating products to make tasty meals faster, but have rounded up an impressive array of ribbons from the Wisconsin State Fair.

Beepa's placed in the Grand Champion Eats and Treats Competition in the harvesting fruits and vegetables division held Thursday in the Grand Champion Hall Building. The wins were as follows: Beepa's spaghetti sauce, first; Beepa's goulash starter, second; and Beepa's Sloppy Joe, third. Beepa's also entered its Bloody Mary mix into the bold beverages division and won best in division and first place.

The Beepa's team consists of owners Justin and Andrea Fjalstad and owner Roger Turner along with kitchen manager Brenda Mahlum. The four couldn't have been more proud of their victory.

"It was a sweep," Andrea Fjalstad said.

"I started tearing up a little bit," Turner added.

Each division, Turner said, had 15 to 20 products with more than 100 entries in the overall competition. The contest was designed for small business owners.

Beepa's wins garnered about \$100, but the real victory is the addition of the state fair ribbon picture which they can add to their label.

Beepa's, which is planning a grand opening soon, continues to grow. It offers dilly beans, pickled mushrooms, spaghetti sauce, chili starter, salsa, Sloppy Joe, BBQ sauce, goulash starter and Bloody Mary mixes.

One of Beepa's claims to fame is being the first company to offer a goulash starter. Like their chili starter, the product only needs a few other ingredients added to make a hearty Midwestern meal in 20 minutes or less. Their fare can be found at Woodman's, Kauffman's, Piggly Wiggly, Clinton Foods and many other area stores.

It all began with Justin and Andrea Fjalstad who had been canning their dilly beans and spaghetti sauce for years. Although the Fjalstads were busy with running their business, SSH Electric, they kept getting inundated with requests for their items from family and friends. Five or six years ago they began taking food classes with a goal of taking the commercial step.

Owner Justin Fjalstad acted as master of recipes and owner Andrea Fjalstad became the accountant and bookkeeper. They brought on Justin's friend since fifth grade, Roger Turner, to act as head of sales, marketing and business functions.

They named the business after Justin's grandfather "Beepa," or Walter Hopper, who shared his love of gardening and blackjack. Both Roger Turner and his grandson Justin remember how much fun he was.

"He was one of the coolest grandpas ever," Roger Turner said.

To perfect and as market their products, the team began offering products everywhere from farmers markets to bars. Turner recalled taking the Bloody Mary mix to bars to have people give critiques in exchange for drink specials.

Brutally honest feedback, Justin Fjalstad said, was critical to fine tuning the recipes. Over the years Fjalstad said he learned simple is better when it comes to taste. Most of his products only have five or six key ingredients.

"This is just good old fashioned canning. You know what everything is, and you have it all in your home kitchen," Justin Fjalstad said.

Beepa's success has only spurred on the team. They are planning to outgrow the building, go nationwide and make Beepa's a household name. They are working to develop a crockpot simmer sauce and meatloaf starter.

"We want to be a household name. We have an everyday niche - quick Midwestern meals on the run," Justin Fjalstad said.

Turner is working to get Beepa's in 200 more stores within the next six months and the team is committed to keeping the growing business in Beloit and giving back to the community.