

Stock up on these Richmond-region staples

From **STARBUCKS** to **SCHAEFFER**



Meet the Folks
Behind the
Brands pg. 79



Nightingale Ice
Cream Sandwiches

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Hot!

Crunch Dynasty

Sprinkle it on everything!

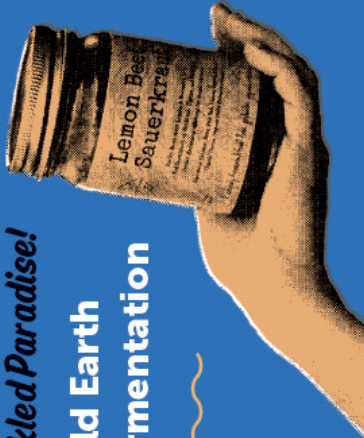
"I can't believe it's not dairy!"



UnMoo Vegan Cheese

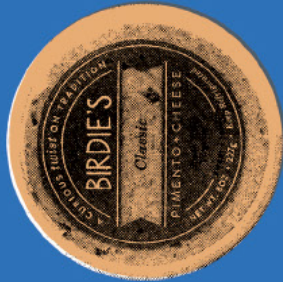
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Pickled Paradise! Wild Earth Fermentation



Birdie's Pimento Cheese

A true Southern staple!



Sweet & Spicy AR's Hot Southern Honey



The shelves and cold cases of grocers like Union Market, Ellwood Thompson's and Stella's Grocery are laden with local goods. Behind all these products are tenacious food entrepreneurs, risk-takers and visionaries who have tirelessly worked to get their products to the market — and to you. →

BY EILEEN MELLON

Mother Shrub

Try all

6

flavors!



THE BUSINESS OF FOOD

Small-business incubators, commissary kitchens and branding experts help culinary entrepreneurs achieve success

“Food startups aren’t a super-sexy, quick-turn, high-velocity investment,” says Austin Green, co-founder of Hatch Kitchen, a commissary-style kitchen and food and beverage small-business incubator. “This stuff can take years, and we’d really love to see that improve in Richmond as we recognize there are a lot of people doing creative things, and an audience that wants to buy these products.”

Green and Brad Cummings opened Hatch Kitchen in Manchester in January 2018. Green learned about the unexpected hurdles startups face when he and business partner Greg White launched Texas Beach Bloody Mary Mix in 2015. Cummings, a successful entrepreneur and co-founder of the

nonprofit Startup Virginia, shared his vision of bringing together like-minded food entrepreneurs to share ideas, network and learn — something Cummings refers to as “positive collision.”

Currently home to a 9,000-square-foot kitchen and a corral where area food trucks can park, Hatch plans to add an on-site health inspector, a cafe and event space, a certified food bottling line and packaging operation, and a USDA meat inspection area — a one-stop food-startup paradise.

“I think that we may have kind of underestimated how long it takes for a food business to get everything they need to be up and running,” Green says, noting that one of the biggest hurdles startups face is raising capital.

Open 24 hours, Hatch’s main kitchen features stainless work tables, industrial mixers and other large-scale kitchen equipment. At any time of day, members bustle around — one visit found a Gaucho food truck employee making arepas while across the room, high-end lollipops from A Secret Forest were being painted like works of art.

According to Elaine Lidholm of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), an average of 120 food businesses seek product approval each month. For a product to go from concept



Campfire & Co. helps startups develop their brands.

Ellwood Thompson's market champions local products.



to container, business owners must submit an application outlining production steps, intended consumers and a list of ingredients. The product must also have appropriate labeling and packaging. Once it is approved and deemed safe, the kitchen where it is produced is inspected.

"It's a lot more complicated than most people realize," says Pam Miles, food safety program supervisor for VDACS.

That's why Hatch offers business classes taught by Startup Virginia and The Apple Cart. Barb Upchurch and Stephanie Ganz (a Richmond magazine contributor) founded The Apple Cart in 2014 to help small food businesses. Now the sole owner, Upchurch's consulting firm offers services from branding to website development to locating brick-and-mortar space.

"Nobody enters into the food industry because they think it would be fun," Upchurch says. "They are passionate about what they are making; there's a reason behind that particular product."

Helping a product's story come to life is essential. That's where people like Christie Thompson, lead strategist at Campfire & Co., come into play. Thompson takes her clients through "brand therapy" sessions, where they work to discover the identity of their product and create a cohesive concept. "Our role early on is to help them organize these ideas and create something with longevity," she says.

Every two years, VDACS hosts the Virginia Food & Beverage Expo, connecting purveyors with buyers, grocers, restaurants and media. Last year, a record 180 exhibitors participated,

and the next expo in March 2020 is expected to top that total.

Many of the products at the expo are part of the 30-year-old VDACS Virginia's Finest program.

"That [Virginia's Finest] label is a genuine seal of approval," Lidholm says. "Agriculture is the largest private industry in Virginia, and many people realize that buying Virginia products keeps food dollars in the local economy."

In recent years, local products such as Reginald's Homemade Peanut Butter and KimKim Korean Hot Sauce have received national attention and widespread distribution. On the pages to come, follow the journey of two Richmond-based companies, UnMoo and Nightingale Ice Cream Sandwiches, from startup to shelf, as they work towards their dreams of national success. ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY ELLWOOD THOMPSON'S; JAY PAUL; COURTESY SALSAS DON SEBASTIAN; COURTESY BELLE ISLE MOONSHINE

PRODUCT PIONEERS

Local grab-worthy goods to add to your shopping list



GOURMET HEMP FOODS

This budding company, led in the kitchen by Chef Tye Hall of T&R Catering, offers hemp-based pasta and various condiments. Are you a hot-sauce head? The hemp "Hottie" sauce made with local peppers is a must.



SALSAS DON SEBASTIAN

Founder America Deloach started this company as a small-batch salsa purveyor using family recipes. Since then, she's added chimichurri and an addictive jalapeño dip to the mix.



BELLE ISLE MOONSHINE

Founded in 2013 by brothers-in-law Vince Riggi and Brian Marks, Belle Isle has poured a line up of six spirits into the market along with its latest offering: crisp, quaffable canned cocktails.

CASE STUDY:

THE MAD SCIENTIST

COMPANY: UNMOO

EST: 2018

OWNER: JOSH KADRICH

In less than a year, Josh Kadrich, founder of UnMoo, has gone from making cheese in a friend's kitchen to receiving a call from a local investor checking on his search for a new, almost 10,000-square-foot production facility.

"This was my depression medication, starting UnMoo," says Kadrich, 30. "I didn't feel like I was contributing a lot of value or living up to my potential. The opportunity to be smart and work hard for myself has been so empowering."

Kadrich grew up in the suburbs of Lynchburg. He was the neighbor kid who caught grass snakes, had poison dart frogs as pets and dreamt of saving the rainforest or becoming the next Steve Irwin. "I was never the best at anything," he says, "except for science." He studied biology at VCU for three years and then began working as a quality manager at Biotech Services.

Kadrich, who says, "I love cheese, but it doesn't love me back," would watch as his boyfriend, Taylor Holden, filled their fridge with goat cheese from the farmers market. Unhappy with his corporate lab job, in the summer of 2017 Kadrich began experimenting with making cheese from cow's milk before trying cashew milk, which he could digest more easily. He describes the first trials as slimy, off-putting and malodorous. But he was determined to figure it out.

Kadrich dove into the world of lactic acids, bacteria and chemical composition, often waking up on the couch cuddling a stack of science journals and artisan cheesemaking books. "I'm pretty crunchy in a lot



Encounter the Cashew

THE HOP

1600 W. Cary St.

Pickle Back pizza: White sesame-seed crust, house red sauce, cashew-based cheese Notz, dill pickle chips, soy chorizo and a hot-pepper relish swirl

HERITAGE

1627 W. Main St.

Impossible Burger: bibb lettuce, onion jam, tomato, Notz and smoked tomato aioli on a brioche bun

IDLE HANDS BREAD CO.

407 Strawberry St.

Croissant: vegan croissant made with Nutter instead of butter

LAMPLIGHTER COFFEE ROASTERS

26 N. Morris St. and 116 S. Addison St. Locations

17 1/2: hot pressed sandwich with marinated tofu, Notz, balsamic glazed onions and jerk-spiced Vegenaïse

of ways but willing to put on my lab suit and play with beakers," he says. "This is equal parts science and technology."

His goal was to create a vegan product that could provide the same sensory experience as cheese. In early 2018, after six months of experimentation, he was finally successful, creating a meltable, shreddable, tears-of-joy-inducing nondairy mozzarella-like cheese that vegans have been waiting for.

UnMoo and its first product, "Notz," were born.

At the time, there were no regulations for vegan cheese production in Virginia. Kadrich approached VDACS with 65 pages of proposed operating procedures. Together, he and a state food scientist determined how the cheese would be regulated.

In July 2018, UnMoo signed a lease at Grindstone Kitchen in the Museum District, and a few weeks later, the company passed VDACS inspection. In early August, Kadrich sold Notz for the first time at the Williamsburg Farmers Market. His product line eventually expanded to include Notz in peppercorn and lemon lavender flavors, a cheese dubbed Habby Jak, and a vegan butter called Nutter.

Idle Hands Bakery owner Jay Metzler, who has a number of loyal vegan customers, discovered Nutter on Instagram. He soon began making vegan croissants with Nutter, and UnMoo's first local partnership was born.

"It's the best vegan butter I've ever tasted. ... It's basically magic," Metzler says.

Soon UnMoo was in stores like Union

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: unMoo's vegan cheese; founder Josh Kadrich; Taylor Holden (left) and Jonathan Lewis during cheese production

CASE STUDY:

A COOL COINCIDENCE

COMPANY: NIGHTINGALE ICE CREAM SANDWICHES

EST: 2016

OWNERS: HANNAH POLLACK & XAVIER MEERS

Nightingale Ice Cream Sandwiches' eight-person female staff methodically moves through the process of making their daily inventory of 3,000 handmade ice cream sandwiches in the production space at Hatch Kitchen.

"When we started, we would only make 100 a week, and that was so much," says Hannah Pollack, laughing.

Pollack, 33, is the younger, slightly more serious half of Nightingale, a company she officially founded in 2016 with her husband, Brussels native Xavier Meers. The couple met while working together in the kitchen at the bygone Belle Vie restaurant in Midlothian, which Meers, 42, co-owned.

While working as executive chef at Greenleaf's Pool Room, Pollack made an ice cream sandwich for dessert. Upon trying it, Meers immediately realized that that the sandwich, vanilla ice cream between two brownie cookies — now Nightingale's "Classic" — had the potential to be more than a novelty treat and become a successful food product. "I knew from the moment I tried it," he recalls.

Pollack would return to her home kitchen after dinner service at Greenleaf's and make as many ice cream sandwiches as she could, selling them to friends at other restaurants and markets. Between lunch and dinner shifts as executive chef at Brux'l Cafe, Meers would deliver them. They named their business Nightingale as an homage to its beginnings at Greenleaf's: The pool hall is named for Ralph Greenleaf, a 20-time World Billiards Champion, and his wife, vaudeville

Signature Sandwiches



FAT BANANA

Peanut-butter cookie and banana ice cream dipped in chocolate



CLASSIC

Chocolate brownie cookie and vanilla ice cream



COOKIE MONSTER

Chocolate chip cookie with cookies-and-cream ice cream



CHOCOLATE ESPRESSO

Chocolate brownie cookie with chocolate-espresso ice cream

actress Amelia Ruth Parker, was known as "The Oriental Nightingale."

By November 2016, Pollack found herself physically unable to balance production and her full-time job, and after a nudge from the optimistic Meers, she quit Greenleaf's to commit to Nightingale. Failure wasn't an option.

"Once you take that step, it scares you enough to where you think, 'I have to make this work, there's nothing to fall back on, no salary,'" Pollack says. "It was hard at first, but we wouldn't be where we are if we were living both worlds."

Serendipitously, Performance Food Group, a Richmond-based food distributor, was looking to add local products to its lineup. Meers, a longstanding customer of PFG as a chef, had shared Nightingale's sandwiches with a sales rep. Four months after Pollack left the restaurant world, Nightingale partnered with PFG for distribution — first in Virginia, then to the entire Mid-Atlantic region. They graduated to a commercial kitchen space at Westbury Pharmacy and began selling an average of 1,200 sandwiches a week to PFG. Today, their products, which include four signature flavors and a number of seasonal sandwiches, can be found in 12 states.

For the last few years, they have worked to grow their business, collaborating on exclusive flavors with local breweries and restaurants. In the beginning of 2019, they became an anchor member of Hatch Kitchen, where they have a designated space and a

[| A COOL COINCIDENCE CONT'D ON P.167 >](#)

OPPOSITE: SARAH DER



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Nightingale's Ice cream sandwiches; founders Xavier Meers and Hannah Pollack; Nightingale's custom sandwich molds

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Market and Ellwood Thompson's, on food trucks like Zorch Pizza and in restaurants such as Pupatella. Then came a call from a local investor, Dan Phipps, offering life-changing capital to UnMoo. Other investors followed.

UnMoo has quickly become a Richmond name. But will it be known nationally?

By October 2018, Kadrach had hired multiple part-time employees, along with a trio of full-timers who abandoned stable jobs to help UnMoo succeed, including his best friend, Jonathan Lewis, along with Tanesia Thompson, a college friend and former sous chef at the plant-based eatery Little Pine in Los Angeles. Now UnMoo's head of production, Thompson recalls a conversation she had with Kadrach before returning to Virginia: "I said to him, 'You know what would change the world? Vegan cheese.'"

Kadrach's boyfriend, Holden, recently left his job at an engineering firm to join UnMoo. "I told my boss, 'This is our life at this point, we are putting everything we have into trying to build this,'" he says.

As the business has grown, Kadrach has evolved from the sole producer and gatekeeper of knowledge to thoughtfully directing his team, building relationships with markets and restaurants, raising money, and systematizing the business. "That's what I have to do in order to ... turn us from a hobby to a national company," he says.

UnMoo envisions an entire line of potential, value-added products distributed across the country — ready-to-bake pizza, brie and blue cheeses, ravioli, cheesecake and cream cheese.

Since March, the team has been scouting properties for a kitchen to call their own, which will help significantly to extend the shelf life of their products. "It's been hard to imagine what is even possible because we've been bottlenecked by this facility, and what we've been able to put out here has been pretty impressive," Kadrach says. "The nature of having a high-growth, volatile startup is that you build your company around conquering hurdles. ... I wouldn't trade it for anything." ■

< A COOL COINCIDENCE CONT'D FROM P.82 |

large walk-in freezer constructed specifically for them.

Now the charismatic Meers, who spent 25 years running restaurants and heading various kitchens, thrives as the face of the company at trade shows across the country.

Pollack, who considers herself more introverted, has been pushed outside of her comfort zone by Nightingale's quick growth. She's no longer working 16-hour shifts making ice cream sandwiches and instead focuses on other facets of the business.

"That was one thing too, realizing that nobody is going to be like you or work like you," Pollack says of the transition. "That's one thing I would always struggle with, but you have to take a bit of a step back and realize what's reasonable."

Although Nightingale is Richmond famous, and Pollack and Meers are local food celebrities, expanding outside the region and the state has had its challenges as they work to convince customers that their nostalgic, premium handmade treats, often made with local ingredients, are worth \$4 per sandwich.

"When we got further out, how hard of a push it was was surprising to us," Pollack says. People would ask, "How much for an ice cream sandwich?"

As demand has increased, they have invested in equipment to assist with production, transitioning from a KitchenAid ice cream maker to an industrial appliance, and from using an ice cream scoop and spatula to a recently purchased depositor and custom molds.

In less than three years, Nightingale has grown from a culinary side project to a multistate operation eyeing half a million ice cream sandwiches sold this year. Meers and Pollack are working toward their goal of filling the cold cases at high-end markets and grocers across the country while holding onto their local Richmond roots.

"I think the people involved with us strongly believe in us — they know the future can be something big and interesting," Meers says. "You have to go and fight for it if you love it, and that's what we do." ■



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