

# MARKETWATCH

## 20 UNDER 40

### Chris Beykirch, 30, owner, Love to Cook!, Logan, Utah



**Describe how you got into the gourmet/specialty food business:** My parents purchased Love to Cook!

as Kitchen Kneads in 1997. In 1999, I had the opportunity to accept the general manager position. Though I have always loved great food, at the time I did not know much about specialty kitchen products. I quickly learned as much as I could. I also began attending the Gourmet Products Show and the International Housewares Show. During the past 10 years, I have assumed the responsibilities of human resources, accounting, inventory management, and cooking school director. In September, my wife and I finalized the stock purchase to become the sole owners.

**Most valuable lesson learned:** Value of friends and networking! Through associations such as Gourmet Catalog I have been able to develop a network of incredible people throughout the country and in many different positions in the gourmet industry. Every year I travel to stores in different parts of the country to discuss business and retail strategy. We are able to bounce ideas back and forth and share successes and best selling products in a non-competitive environment. It is amazing how often other stores have faced similar challenges and can offer a great solution.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** Love to Cook! has doubled in size with a cooking school in operation four days a week. Our sales have increased almost \$1 million annually in the past 10 years. Our staff has grown to 15 from four employees and expands to 22 during the fourth quarter. Our average daily sales have increased from \$300 to \$3,000, along with average daily customer counts increasing from 30 to 160. Our goal is to increase annual sales to \$2 million in five years. We also plan to expand our website to include every item in the store and to fully integrate with the POS system

### Kelly Bock, 30, operations manager, Rolling Pin Kitchen Emporium, Brandon, Fla.



**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty**

**food business:** I became directly involved in the business when I was just 18. I saw that Rolling Pin was reopening with new owners and they were hiring. I started in 1997 as a sales associate and within a year was given the opportunity to work directly with Karen West (buyer), Dave's wife and co-owner of Rolling Pin. She taught me the administrative side of the business.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** To never give up on an idea too quickly because retail business is so unpredictable. In the past we have been quick to jump to a conclusion about a promotion or an idea we had for the store before we really let it run its course. The new location, though only three blocks away, brought an entirely new customer base and a significant shift in product and services needs. Many things are just trial and error and then you move on. We can't rely on the past. We must continue to move on, try new things and do what is best for the business.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** Being involved from almost the beginning, it was truly a wonderful experience to watch a small 1,600-square-foot gourmet kitchen store grow into a 4,500-square-foot store. Our customer base continues to grow daily and now we really have the space and the accommodations that allow us to give our customers what they want in a gourmet kitchen store. The new store also allowed us to bring in a more diverse selection of product. My future business plans are to remain with Rolling Pin and lead this growing business in new and more innovative ways.

### Evan Dash, 36, CEO,



### Prepara, New York

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food business:** In 1997 I was promoted to vice president/DMM for housewares and food for Macy's. Subsequently, I became a senior vice president/

GMM for Macys. In 2005, I left the corporate world to launch two gourmet startups, which are now among the fastest growing young companies in the gourmet industry.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** Achieving success is a complex formula that is constantly changing. It takes hard work, focus and determination every day to deliver outstanding products and execute strategies for packaging, pricing, and channel distributions not to mention sales, operations, logistics and finance. But most of all, you must "do right" by your customers everyday.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** Over the past three years, Prepara and Primula have gone from concepts to full-fledged companies. We have launched more than 30 new products and will have our products distributed in almost 15,000 retail locations by the end of 2008. We now have a great base of business to build on. We are set with our distribution outlets and in this second phase we are working closely with our core customers to continue an aggressive rollout strategy of new products. Over the next 24 months, we expect to launch almost 50 new products, most with patented features or technologies.

### Patrick Ford, 35, international marketing director, Ford's Gourmet



### Foods, Raleigh, N.C.

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** I went to college thinking I was going to be a stock broker or a doctor and after college I realized I wanted to work in the

family business. And I was terrible in biology.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** That business is just about a lot of friendships.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** Since rejoining the family business in 1997, I have expanded its international presence by exhibiting at 36 international trade shows in seven countries and have spoken at the World Trade Center in North Carolina, Wake Technical College Business and Industry Center, and for the N.C. Community College System. In the past 3 years we have grown from limited exporting to just becoming the first ever Exporter of the Year for North Carolina. The award is presented by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The department created the award to honor agriculture businesses that successfully export North Carolina food products around the world. Ford's already exports to 40 countries, and our plans are to expand into Asia and Australia

### Michael & Kathryn Graham, both 32, owners, C'est Cheese, Santa Barbara, Calif.



**Describe how you got**

**involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** My (Michael's) first foray into specialty food was a job working at Zingerman's Deli after I graduated from college. It was there that I learned about a ton about artisan foods, and also a lot about how to run a successful business.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** The importance of staying true to your vision. Describe how your business has grown and your future plans: We've had very good growth since we've opened. It's actually been remarkably steady and consistent, which is ideal. Our current plans are to focus on our store, expand our offerings into prepared foods and sandwiches and to generally fill the place up with delicious foods.

### Angela Ichwan, 36, CEO, Arico Natural Foods, Beaverton, Ore.

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** I co-founded Arico Natural Foods with my husband Hermanto Hidayat in 2004. I had



worked as a global food developer for Fortune 50 food companies. My background is in food science. I had always wanted to start a food-related business, but I also wanted to make a positive contribution to the world. We

decided to develop a line of "mindful snacks"—snacks that taste good and are nutritious. Ultimately, our passion is about changing the world by changing the way people eat.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** I learned that you couldn't possibly know everything. Ask the right questions. Find the right people who can guide you. There will always be someone you can learn from, or help solve any problem you may have.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your plans for the future are:** In the beginning, it was just the two of us working out of our small apartment. When we landed one of our first accounts in 2005, we baked cookies in a rented commercial kitchen for two days straight to fulfill their first order. We've come a long way since those days. In 2006, SPINS named us the fastest growing gluten-free snacks company in the country. Last year, we introduced a line of all-natural cassava chips. Our products are now sold nationwide. We now have seven team members who work with us out of our headquarters. As for the future, we continue to develop good tasting and wholesome food. Our sales are growing at a quadruple-digit rate this year. We want to continue this momentum. We strive to be the leading and most trusted food company for people with special dietary needs. In 2007, we were thrilled to become the world's first carbon-neutral gluten-free snacks company.

### Ryan Montague, 24, owner Gourmet Business Solutions LLC, a web-based consulting and marketing company, Clearwater, Fla.

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** I got my start in the gourmet industry when I had the opportunity to work for then-New Orleans-based GourmetFoodMall.com, a startup that launched in 2001. This is where I got my first real-world experience with web-based consulting work

and both BtoC and BtoB online ad campaign management. Following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was no longer a safe or economically sound living environment, so I decided to relocate permanently and start my own



business based on the gourmet food industry experience I had gained.

**Most valuable lesson learned:** To embrace

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things that most people despise—failures, competition, and stress-inducing matters because I have learned and grown the most from them. I now find positivity in failed initiatives because I know that I will learn something to help me improve next time. I now build relationships with perceived competition because open doors can lead to new opportunities. I now find stress to be healthy because success and happiness wouldn't be the same without it.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your plans for the future are:** My business started out with one basic website, one pro-bono client, and one employee (me) offering only a handful of consulting and web marketing services. Since our first year, we have now increased revenues by more than 400 percent, in part because of our growing staff (now seven) and network of eight highly trafficked websites including a consumer shopping site, a discussion forum, an online business encyclopedia, a video site, a PR portal, and a business directory—all specifically for the gourmet food industry. Since launch, we have worked with more than 200 gourmet food companies and currently have roughly 60 active clients that we serve. In September, we launched FoodFunding.com, an online portal dedicated to connecting food companies with investors.

## Meghan A. Mullaney, 26, manager-artisanal cheese department, Sickles Market, Little Silver, N.J.



**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** While pursuing my BFA at Endicott College in Beverly, Mass., I began working at a small, gourmet and produce store in town, The Fruitful Basket. As the demand for specialty cheeses grew in 2002, my interest in them did as well. I spent two and a half years as the cheese monger of The Fruitful Basket. My awareness of cuisine and specialty food products intensified and my passion for handmade cheeses was locked into play.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** To trust my own palate and my inherited business sense.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your plans for the future:** Our cheese department received a renovation one year ago this fall. We relocated the department from the deli side of the store to the bakery/grocery side of the store. Our workspace has expanded greatly and our retail space has grown somewhat. The collection of cheeses that we carry is extensively artisanal. Less than 10 years ago, the cheese department at Sickles Market was minute. Today we carry the most exquisite cheeses from the U.K., Europe and the Americas. In the cheese department we also carry fine olives, charcuterie, rare honeys, nougat, caviar, truffles and select preserves. There are plans of growth for Sickles Market that

I would like to be a part of. We are on the map of specialty retailers, but if there are ways to further our leadership in the industry and I can assist with that, then that is what I would like to do. Eventually, when I feel I have done what I can do here and I am ready to venture on my own, I will find myself a few goats and start on the other end of the chain that I have been working on. Cheese making is a difficult art form that I would like to conquer.

## Marieke, 31, and Rolf Penterman, 34, partners, Holland's Family Cheese LLC, Thorp, Wis.



**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** My husband Rolf and his brother both wanted to farm. Rolf came to the United States in 2002, and I followed in 2003. While Rolf was farming, I was looking for something to do. At first I wanted to make children's furniture, but I had trouble finding someone to carry out my designs. At the same time, we were missing the cheese from Holland and we were having friends and relatives bring it with them in their suitcases. But the weight restrictions on luggage was getting to be a problem. So I decided I would try to make it on my own. I took classes and got my cheesemaking license and went back to Holland where I worked with a woman cheesemaker with 10 cows and a man with 200 cows. And between them, I found a method that would work for me.

**Most valuable lessons learned:** There are so many different aspects: learning to make the cheese, learning the marketing and running the store. I was afraid I would be too focused, but I discovered I can find solutions to the problems. If it doesn't go the way you want, you have to innovate.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your plans are for the future:** We were lucky to win all those awards (eight at this year's American Cheese Society Competition, including first place in Dutch-Style Cheese and Smoked Cheese). That put us on the road to expanding our sales. We also go to the food shows, which is very important, so more people know about our cheese. And we're expanding the line with a gouda that is strongly connected to Wisconsin.

## Kristin Sande, 39, co-owner, Valley Cheese and Wine, Las Vegas



**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** I've always been into cheese. Growing up in the Midwest, we'd go to the cabin in Wisconsin and I'd beg to go to the cheese factories. As a young adult I

cooked professionally having become fascinated with food, which evolved into the retail aspect. I always wanted to be self-employed. When I met my now husband Bob Howald at the American Cheese Society conference it was clear that we were destined to open a cheese shop.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** There are so many ways to do the same thing and the ways aren't necessarily right or wrong. So figuring out how to communicate effectively has been as challenging as it is rewarding.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** Going into our third year, the trust with our customer has just been amazing. We sell mostly European wines, which are hard to find here. At first, people were intimidated and not willing to trust us on selections. Now people will buy a case without hesitation and we regularly hear, "everything you've sold me before has been great. I completely trust you and thank you." In the future, we want to continue with our growth at one location. Areas of growth are expanding our classes, gift baskets/boxes and maybe offer some small selections of prepared foods and green market. We have a local farm that supplies us with fresh produce and farm fresh eggs!



## Jim Thaller, 38, CEO of Talier Trading Group Inc., a consultancy/brokerage

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food business:** Years ago, I had sold my first company, a New York-based software development group, and was looking for a new challenge. The specialty food industry was intriguing to me, so I accepted a position as vice president-sales and marketing for a European specialty food importer. After five years, I decided to use my expertise in the industry to impact struggling, emerging markets like Southeast Asia, South America, and now Africa.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** In recent years, I've learned that the specialty food industry is in fact a viable economic development solution. Our work in Africa, where the overwhelming majority of the population works in some form of agriculture, proves that. Specialty food exports are the most obvious and most sustainable business model available. Besides simply creating jobs and opportunity in harsh regions, it also allows us to market a sense of identity for these regions, which will most certainly impact other industries, including tourism.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** In the past few years, we've grown tremendously in the areas of emerging markets. My company has become more involved with public/private partnerships, working closely with government groups, NGOs and other support organizations to design and implement development initiatives in the specialty food industry. We've also been successful at developing and expanding emerging categories. The African specialty foods category was non-existent just a few years ago. Today, it is one of the fastest-growing categories for retailers. Our plans are to continue using the specialty food industry as a tool to combat extreme poverty, particularly in Africa. Now that the category has been solidified, and accepted, we face the challenge of continuing to innovate

the range of products coming out of these regions. In the future, we'll see more emphasis on regional specialties and easy to prepare options.

## Guillermo Trias, 31, Eva Trias, 34, and Jose Sarrate, 37, owners Solex Partners, Chicago, a Spanish food

### importing and distribution company



**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:**

In February 2004,

Guillermo—at that time studying for his MBA at Kellogg Business School got into the adventure of developing a business plan that would help him to follow his dream of promoting the culture and lifestyle of Spain in America. He decided that there was no better way to do that than to bringing the thing that he missed the most: the delicious foods of Spain and the art of tapas. Guillermo shared his plans and his passion for the delicacies of Spain with his sister Eva and his brother-in-law Jose, who also realized the potential of their country's authentic foods while studying their MBAs at Georgetown University and USC in California, respectively. Solex's first project started at the end of 2004 with a national campaign for the well known "Jamon de Serrano from Spain" throughout high-end food service accounts and gourmet retailers in Chicago.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** The main shared lesson is that all the members of an organization need to follow their principles and be loyal to a mission and vision no matter what. As entrepreneurs they have to learn that to build a coherent, solid and profitable business every day, teamwork and perseverance are key.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your plans for the future:** Solex, which has evolved from a marketing research project into a solid company with ambitious expansion goals, selects and imports more than a hundred food products—from Serrano ham and specialty sausages to artisanal cheeses and selected extra virgin olive oils. Solex delivers its delicacies from Spain to more than 300 customers and passionately promotes its products through an active involvement in education and knowledge sharing within the community. Solex's plans can be contained in one simple sentence: to become the best friend for our customers. By making their lives easy, developing trust and making available for them a magnificent array of authentic gourmet products from Spain.

## Gwen Uhlig, 32, owner, Cucina Fresca, Elko, Nev.



**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business:** In October

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2002, my husband and I took a leap of entrepreneurial faith and opened the doors to a gourmet kitchen store in downtown Elko. Cucina Fresca was inspired by the need for more unique, specialty shopping establishments and by the desire to play a part in helping to diversify Elko's economy. My husband and I both love to cook while spending time with friends and family, so a gourmet kitchen store seemed to be the perfect match. Because we were both raised on family ranches in Elko County, we have a strong commitment to our rural community and to small business.

**I knew this was what I wanted to do:** After the second day of work as a chemist in a large corporate environment. I lasted three months and immediately started working on plans for my own small business.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** Never settle for mediocre employees. Hire talented, hard-working people and your business will grow in remarkable, unexpected ways. Trusting your staff and allowing them to excel can create amazing results.

**Describe how your business has grown and your plans for the future:** We have experienced growth of an average of 25 percent each year since we have been open. This has allowed us to purchase the building we previously leased and includes a space triple the size of our current retail space. We plan to greatly expand our selection of wine and to include a wine bar. Our selection of kitchenware and gourmet food will also increase. In addition, we are planning a cooking school, a catering business, a bakery, and a meal prep business all to be run out of the same location. I have heard over and over from my Gourmet Catalog Buying Group friends that a cooking school usually only breaks even, so I am looking for additional ways for a kitchen to pay for itself.

that point on, we grew steadily, moving peanut butter production to its own factory in Brooklyn and then to Georgia.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** "You don't know what you don't know until you don't know it." It is a mantra I live by. Trying to discover the hidden potential problems in any endeavor before it is begun is a valuable skill that can often help keep crises at bay. Of course, we can't always see what's lying just around the corner, so when we get hit by something unexpected, sometimes you've just got to chalk it up to experience!

**Describe how your business has grown and what your plans are for the future:** Peanut Butter & Co. is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Our first five years were spent as a sandwich shop and mail-order business. In 2003 we launched our wholesale program, and we've experienced more than 30 percent growth every year since then. We've got 10 full-time peanut butter fiends working in our corporate office, and another 15 part-timers at our sandwich shop. Our shop in Greenwich Village serves hundreds of thousands of peanut butter sandwiches a year, and our eight varieties of all natural peanut butter are now sold in more than 10,000 stores throughout the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Japan. Future business plans include new products and brand extensions in 2009, as well as some updates to our packaging, and increased marketing to consumers using social networking sites and various coupon programs.

**business:** I first became involved with gourmet food through my part-time job as a sales associate for a specialty foods retailer during my college years.

**Most challenging business moment:** Separating my personal life from the needs and demands of my business has been the most challenging aspect of owning a business. Although I consider myself an individual with many diverse interests, I found myself changed after the opening of the Gourmet Boutique in 2004. All the literature on my nightstand was comprised of trade magazines and small business journals. Four years in, I am proud to say that I have learned to balance my personal life with the needs of a growing business. My family and friends have been very tolerant over the past several years as I had to pass up many outings for late night merchandising sessions.

**Most valuable lesson I've learned:** The fun and the challenge of owning a business is that the learning never really stops. A few costly learning experiences: Be sure to sample all products to arrive on the store shelves personally no matter how fabulous the packaging. Learn to delegate because you can't do everything well—and if you can there is not enough of you to do all that is needed for a new, rapidly growing company. Failed projects provide the best forum for learning and growth. In my opinion, key contributors to the success of a retail operation (location – is a given) are the staff and creatively merchandised, well-selected product. Hiring the right individual to help build the company is key.

After numerous hiring mistakes we have set up a 30-day trial period to determine if a new hire is a good fit for our company and will work well with the rest of our staff. Always stay ahead of the hiring curve—if you have been fortunate enough to find a passionate, reliable and energetic employee try to keep that individual on payroll (if the numbers permit it) even during slower times of the year as it will pay off in the long run.

**Describe how your business has grown and what your future plans are:** A year and a half ago we began to import products from Europe to meet the growing needs of our Boutique and to offset the rising costs of European products. We also have a full ecommerce site that contains a food blog and food trivia to try to capture the experience of visiting our brick and mortar location and interacting with one of our in-house staff foodies. We are looking forward to the re-launch of our website with many new products and some extra fun features such as the "Foodies Travel Itinerary" page based on our past trips abroad.

Although we have gone from approximately 12 vendors in 2004 to more than 60 in 2008 we are continuously searching for new and innovative gourmet gift products and will be adding 110 more SKUs in September/October 2008. We have outgrown our lovely but tiny shop and are currently seeking a second location for the Gourmet Boutique.

*Editor's Note: The complete 20 under 40 profiles will be online at www.gourmetnews.com*

**Lee Zalben, 35, founder and**



**owner of Peanut Butter & Co., New York**

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet**

**business:** While at senior at Vassar, my roommates declare me the undisputed peanut butter making champion of the world. I think that's a title I wouldn't mind putting to good use, and envision a shop where one could walk in and order any kind of peanut butter sandwich they can dream up... Reality sets in. Graduation, moving to New York, a job in advertising and publishing, and a Master's Degree. Then one day I'm walking down the street in Greenwich Village and I spy a boarded-up storefront – right near NYU and SoHo. It seems like the perfect place for the peanut butter shop idea I had so many years ago. I go and check out the place, and from the moment I walk in, I can see it all – the counter, the kitchen, the tables and chairs. The next day I quit my job and take some freelance work at an agency while I write a business plan, and learn everything I can about my newfound profession. And six months later, Peanut Butter & Co. opens, introducing the world to a new kind of peanut butter. I always knew the sandwich shop would find a local following. What surprised me the most was when customer starting coming in with Tupperware containers, wanting to take our peanut butter home. From



**Anya Zelfond, 28, owner, Gourmet Boutique, Boston**

**Describe how you got involved in the gourmet**

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