

Chips off the old block

Classic snack has renaissance in Saratoga Springs birthplace

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Tuesday, August 18, 2009 10:04 PM EDT

SARATOGA SPRINGS - When life gives lemons, some people make lemonade. Dan Jameson and Paul Tator made potato chips instead.

After feeling the pinch of a slow economy, Jameson, who formerly worked in military information technology, and Tator, who worked in construction, decided to form their own business and base it on a local classic.

"There's a lot of history in Saratoga that has fallen by the wayside," Jameson said.

According to the entrepreneur, Saratoga Springs is the home of the club sandwich, was one of the original casino resorts and is the birthplace of the American potato chip.

Through a little research at the Saratoga Springs History Museum in Canfield Casino, the business partners discovered an interesting slice from the city's past. Chef George

Crum first served potato chips at Moon's Lake House on Saratoga Lake in 1853. The chips quickly gained popularity, and Moon Brand Original Saratoga Chips were sold commercially throughout New England into the 20th century.

"In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Saratoga Chips were widely known," Tator said.

The friends decided to mix business with history.

"We wanted to reclaim the birthplace of the potato chip," Jameson said.

Under the umbrella of Saratoga Specialties Company, Jameson and Tator relaunched the Moon Brand Original Saratoga Chips on the Fourth of July at Canfield Casino.

Both the recipe and packaging are true to the source material.

"We spent a lot of time doing research. It's just like the original, as close as we can discern," Tator said.

Jameson and Tator took a crash course on Saratoga Chips.

"The recipe was the culmination of thousands of accounts," Jameson said.

The research included reading through information at the Saratoga Springs History Museum and finding information online and in vintage gourmet magazines and trade publications.

Jameson said they wanted to ensure the quality of the chips, and they adjusted their recipe based on several taste panels. He believes the key is the right balance of Yukon gold potatoes, cottonseed oil and sea salt.

"There's no trans fat, and they have a quarter of the sodium of most chips," he said.



They also wanted to reproduce the original packaging.

Painstakingly working with a faded and water-stained potato chip box that is part of the Saratoga Springs History Museum collection, Jameson and Tator kept the packaging as similar to the vintage product as possible.

"It took hours and hours and hours in Photoshop," Tator said.

In addition, they had to add modern packaging requirements, like a bar code and nutritional information.

"We had a lot to learn, particularly on FDA packaging," Tator said.

The chips currently are being manufactured in Pennsylvania and distributed through a local warehouse, but the business owners have plans to move the entire operation to the area in the next year. They would like to see the company eventually become all local, including purchasing potatoes from area farmers.

When it comes to the chip business, Jameson and Tator have gone out of the deep fryer and into the fire in a matter of weeks.

The chips are now available in more than 85 retail locations, which has required the business partners to do everything from marketing to delivery.

"We had to buy a truck. The growth is that explosive," Jameson said.

Both Jameson and Tator credit their family members with a lot of assistance along the way, but they laugh about doing all the grunt labor themselves.

"When it comes to getting out and sweating on a 90-degree day, it's us," Tator said.

Despite the long days and hard work, the entrepreneurs are glad to see business sizzling.

"I think we touched on an inferno here," Jameson said. "It's taken on a life of its own."

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