



Your Life COOKING

Seasoning's greetings

Popcorn lovers delight in sprinkling gourmet flavors on their favorite snack

By Long Hwa-shu
STAFF WRITER

Highland Park native Brian Taylor has always loved popcorn except that he wanted to season it his own way.

So while a student at the University of Michigan he started experimenting with different flavors. The run-of-the-mill flavors like butter and caramel just wouldn't do. His creations were so popular that fellow students and friends came knocking on his door begging for more.

"Popcorn tastes delicious. It's natural and crunchy. It can take any flavor and it's always going to be delicious," said Taylor, who graduated from Highland Park High School in 1996.

At Michigan, he majored in philosophy. He may well have minored in popcorn studies had the university offered it.

"One thing about philosophy is it employs logic as a tool. It enables you to think clearly so it helps solve your problems," said Taylor, 24, who received a bachelor's degree from Ann Arbor in 2000.

Creative thinking

Logic and creative thinking, he said, are tools that can be of tremendous help to people in business. Evidently, he applied them when he launched Kernel Season's, a company that makes gourmet popcorn seasonings, right after he got his college degree.

"I always wanted to have my own business. I thought since I loved popcorn, I could start a business selling popcorn seasonings."

Using logic, he started selling them first to movie theaters because he thought movie-goers can't seem to watch a movie without munching on popcorn simultaneously. It worked.

"We started with movie theaters and they expressed an interest in our products," said Taylor, adding, "Theaters make money on their concessions where popcorn is a mainstay."

Today, Taylor's company is selling to 20 percent of the movie theaters in the United States. Translated, it means 5,000 movie houses where customers sprinkle his seasonings into their popcorn with no additional charge.

With 10 flavors, Kernel Season's products, which are in powder form, are also available in grocery stores like Jewel Food Stores. They retail at about \$2.99 per three-ounce container. Customers can also buy direct from the company on the Web site: www.nomore nakedpopcorn.com. Taylor hates naked popcorn and wants to see it dressed up with his creations.

"We get about 500 visits a day," said Taylor who has moved his company to Chicago from Highland Park.

The 10 flavors, listed in the order of popularity, are: white cheddar, nacho cheddar, Parmesan and ranch, sour garlic, jalapeno, cream and onion, barbecue, cajun, apple cinnamon and chocolate marshmallow. All have been certified kosher except Parmesan and ranch, along with sour garlic. Taylor stresses that his ingredients are all natural.

Favorites

Taylor's own favorites are Parmesan and ranch and jalapeno which is hot and spicy. He is continuing experimenting with new flavors with his associates, friends and family members.

"We're looking into salt and vinegar and gourmet caramel," he said.

Last year, Kernel Season's which employs six people, had \$1.15 million in sales which Taylor would like to see climb to \$2 million this year.

Using his logic that if his seasonings are good for popcorn they should also go well with some other snack foods, Taylor is thinking about expanding their uses.

"Right now, we want to stay focused on popcorn, but there are big opportunities around," he said.

By the way, October is National Popcorn Month.

The only proper way to celebrate it is by popping popcorn into your mouth. Taylor, of course, hopes you want to season it with one of his products.

Americans consume 17 billion quarts of popcorn a year, according to the National Popcorn Board. And popcorn is now the state snack of Illinois.

Popcorn is considered a good source of carbohydrate energy and fiber. It is low in calories.



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN BY STACIA TIMONER

Brian Taylor, formerly of Highland Park, is president of Kernel Season's, a company that makes gourmet popcorn seasonings. The company is headquartered in Chicago.

Kernel Season's 10 flavors (in order of popularity)

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| 1. White cheddar | 5. Jalapeno | 9. Apple cinnamon |
| 2. Nacho cheddar | 6. Cream and onion | 10. Chocolate marshmallow |
| 3. Parmesan and ranch | 7. Barbecue | |
| 4. Sour garlic | 8. Cajun | |



Kernel Season's sells its gourmet popcorn seasonings to 20 percent of the movie theaters in the United States. There are 5,000 movie houses where customers sprinkle the seasonings onto their popcorn.

According to Taylor, one cup of popcorn has 31 calories if eaten plain — 133 calories if drizzled with a tablespoon of butter, margarine or oil; 34 calories if sprayed with butter-flavored oil; and 35 calories if sprinkled with a butter substitute.

Most Kernel Season's flavors have less than two calories per serving.

Looking back, Taylor said he did the right thing by going into business rather than becoming a philosopher.

"It's been a great learning experience and I got to meet a lot of wonderful people," he said.

"Best of all, I've been able to help dress up all the naked popcorn," he added, laughing.