



Coffee + Syrup

Glory Days

Success just gets sweeter for Sylvias

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HERALD NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Dave and Mary Sylvia believe the mission they chose to accept — breaking the coffee syrup barrier that surrounds southeastern Massachusetts and all of Rhode Island — is now entirely possible.

"That's been my purpose in life," Mary says. "I feel strongly it's going to happen."

The Dartmouth duo are the entrepreneurs behind Morning Glory Old Fashioned Coffee Syrup — an all-natural product — that the 160-store Whole Foods Market chain based in Cambridge is looking to put on its shelves nationwide.

They've been negotiating with the firm for a year, a contract is imminent and that's why Mary feels that very soon folks from Kansas to Kentucky and Michigan to Mississippi will be embracing this region's deliciously quirky tradition of adding coffee syrup to milk.

"Anywhere out of the area we've got to educate because it's truly a regional drink," he says. "But it's also versatile, as an ice cream topping and dessert ingredient," she says.

When they break that barrier, Dave, 34, and Mary, 36, — who've been working on this since 2000 — will make a few lifestyle changes.

He'll quit his job as clinical manager of a home care agency to run the business; she'll continue part-time work as an occupational therapist at Charlton Memorial Hospital.

This all began when the pair, with little money in



The first batch of Morning Glory coffee syrup was made on the Sylvias' cast iron stove. Its packaging, bottom, has been updated to suit market preferences.

HERALD NEWS PHOTOS: JACK FOLEY
Mary Sylvia takes care of a drip of Morning Glory Old Fashioned Coffee Syrup off the bottle being poured by her husband, Dave, at their home in Dartmouth. The Sylvias have been producing bottles of their family recipe for local stores and restaurants for several years. Now they're on the cusp of going national, thanks to contract talks with Whole Foods Market.

TWO WAYS TO ENJOY YOUR MORNING GLORY

Morning Glory Coffee Cookies

1/2 cup shortening
2/3 cup sugar
2 tablespoons Morning Glory syrup
1 egg
3/4 cup sifted all purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon vanilla

Cream shortening and sugar until very light and fluffy. Add other ingredients. Arrange by teaspoonfuls on a buttered cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees until edges are firm and top is dry (about 10 to 12 minutes). Cookies will be a thin, crisp

wafer. For thicker, chewy cookies add an additional 1/3 cup of flour.

Morning Glory Hot Mocha

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons cocoa
1/2 cup Morning Glory syrup
4 cups milk

Combine syrup, cocoa and cinnamon in a medium saucepan until dissolved and consistency is smooth. Gradually stir in milk. Warm over medium heat, stirring constantly until hot. Do not boil. Remove from heat. Top with whipped cream before serving.



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The Sylvia family never runs out of coffee syrup. From left are Dave Sylvia, Grace, 6, Mary Sylvia, Luke, 3, and Meredith, 23 months.

Syrup: Recipe about to go national

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hand, decided to use his family's coffee syrup recipe — dating from the early 1900s — as the basis for Christmas gifts. "We always had the best-tasting stuff around," says Dave.

Like his parents, James and Joan Sylvia, the couple brewed the three ingredients — mountain-grown coffee, sugar and water — in small batches. They used an antique Glenwood range, poured the product into canning jars and topped each with a checkered cloth tied with string and a label featuring the stove. "Very simple," says Mary.

Of course it was a hit. "Gourmet coffee syrup," they chorus. "After you taste it, there's no turning back. It's like something you'd get at a soda fountain."

Just as grateful recipients were urging Dave and Mary to go into production with the product, Silmo — the region's only coffee syrup producer — closed its New Bedford plant. The Sylvias figured they had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

The first stop in their modest marketing campaign was Lees Market. According to Dave, Albert Lees III stuck his finger in a jar of Morning Glory, declared it excellent and said he'd put it on his shelves. He also gave them good business advice on licensing and food safety matters.

"Back then two batches made 24 jars," says Mary. "And the canning process to seal the jars was labor intensive," says Dave.

On Lees' advice they sent the syrup to a food testing lab in Jamaica Plain, which offered its own suggestions. "We altered the recipe about five times," says Dave. "It's now more concentrated and actually tastes better," says Mary.

That process took a year because again they were short of

funds and starting to raise a family. "We were shoving out money, but business wasn't coming back to us," says Mary. But in 2001 Morning Glory made it into Lees and they say that while it moved, sales thankfully weren't overwhelming.

"It took a while to take off. We didn't do any promotion," says Dave. "We weren't really educated about what direction to go in," says Mary. So they put their people skills — honed in the health care field — to work, doing samplings at farm stands and markets, bookstores and gift shops.

And then the orders began rolling in. "We put our noses to the grindstone and did it," says Dave. "We were getting orders filled," says Mary.

With the work becoming overwhelming for their home-based certified kitchen, they switched production to the certified commercial kitchen at Woodland Bakers in Rochester. The company — owned by her parents, Linda and John Gurney — produces specialty desserts for restaurant and cafes, among other venues. Mary alone makes the syrup nights and weekends, handles phone orders and does deliveries, while Dave handles all the computer work and labeling.

The packaging recently was changed, over the protests of fans who loved the original. "It looked too homey," says Dave. "We made it look more professional," says Mary.

There is a high degree of energy as they talk about the product — and their children, Grace, 6, Luke, 3, and Meredith, 2, hover about — in the dining room of their lovingly restored antique Cape Cod home on Chase Road.

The house and kids are among the reasons they were forced to grow the business slowly, something they appreciate in retro-

spect. They took advice from the professionals at the Small Business Administration and market owners like Lees, all of which kept their eyes on the prize.

"We never jumped around," says Dave. "We're amateurs, but let me tell you we've done a lot of research," says Mary.

They've also met the right people at the right time. "Every time we did a sampling we met people who were a key. People pop into our lives," says Mary.

One of those is Chef Aaron DeRego, co-owner of The Back Eddy in Westport and a high school pal of Dave's. When he learned what they were up to, he started using the syrup in the restaurant's tiramisu dessert. Another is Nancy Manley of Alderbrook Farm in Dartmouth who took to the product early on and likes to say she doesn't promote it, it promotes itself.

Now with 16 local establishments on board — they recently signed Clement's Market in Portsmouth, R.I. — and the prospect of a contract with Whole Foods, they are taking advice from a retired Pepsi vice president who is working with SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives. He's helping them put together a plan for bottling 4,000 containers of coffee syrup at a time, which would mean renting or buying a production facility, a move they're ready to make with one caveat.

"We want to get big, but we don't want to lose the quality," he says, adding they also don't want to lose the wonderful personal connections made during the past five years. "It's nice to be around people."

The coffee syrup, available in 16-ounce bottles, sells for \$5 in the regular version; \$5.50 in the decaffeinated version. Gallons and half gallons are also available, as is shipping. The Web site is www.morningglorysyrup.com, and they can be reached at dsmorning@comcast.net.