

UA graduate brings Good Clean Food to the table

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It's been years since Kurt Shisler moved away from Central Ohio, but the fond memories of his youth have continued to simmer.



"There is no other product like this anywhere," notes Kurt Shisler, Good Clean Food's Founder and President. (www.goodcleanfood.com)

Photo: Scott Dorrance

The Upper Arlington native is founder of Good Clean Food, a company based in Portland, Maine, that offers quick, healthful options for dinner, he said.

Shisler, 48, said his appreciation for good meals started when he was young. His mother enjoyed cooking and usually had something delicious on the table at dinnertime, he explained.

"We always had good food," he said. "It was a nightly ritual that became part of my soul."

With his father working as a food broker, Shisler said he spent plenty of time in high school going to various grocery stores selling the new summer promotions and making sure products were stocked.

He graduated from Upper Arlington High School in 1977, then attended Harvard Business School. It was a friend's comment during a dinner party that planted the idea of Good Clean Food in Shisler's brain.

Shisler said he spent the better part of a day creating a sauce for the fish that was served at the party. A comment was made about how great it would be to buy a premade sauce that tasted like it was homemade, or "a day's work in a jar," he said.

"I thought that could be really interesting," Shisler said. "That was kind of a kernel of an idea."

Shisler worked in the food industry for several years and during the early 1990s, he finally started his own business.

He used fresh ingredients to create sauces in small batches that could be added to fish. Ten minutes of simmering and a dinner can be served.

"You can put dinner on the table in 15 minutes," Shisler said.

He said the product is ideal for busy moms who don't have hours to make a healthful dinner, but don't want to feel guilty for making a prepackaged "boxed dinner".

Shisler funded the company by himself and was the one making the sauces. After five years, he was overwhelmed and decided to pull the plug.

But the business has returned, with backing from investors.

Good Clean Food offers three simmer sauces for seafood: Mediterranean, Creole and Scandinavian Dill.

The sauces are available for \$7.99 in Central Ohio at Whole Foods and Wild Oats. The sauces can be found at 70 Whole Foods stores across the country.

Because they are made with fresh ingredients and no preservatives, the sauces must be refrigerated, which can create a marketing challenge, Shisler said.

They are not in the traditional sauce or seasoning aisles, so customers might not notice them in the coolers, he said. However, Whole Foods has the sauces located next to the fish.

"There is no other product like this anywhere," Shisler said.

He said no other companies have created a similar product because it goes against the traditional process of creating a mass-produced food product.

"The only way to get the taste of making it from scratch is to make it exactly as you would if you were making it from scratch," Shisler said.

In addition to the fish sauces, simmer sauces for chicken made their debut in Boston last week. The sauces come in Cacciatore, French Tarragon and Maine Cider flavors.

Shisler said his goal is to have all flavors available in major grocery stores across the country.

"Things are going well, but this is a slow build," he said. "It takes time to make customers aware of what's out there."

For more information on the sauces, visit the Web site: goodcleanfood.com.

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