

Published November 5th, 2014

## Local Mom Creates Teas for Kids

By Sophie Braccini



Christine Wheeler presents Drazil - teas for kids. Photo provided

Christine Wheeler is a fine addition to the Lamorinda community of entrepreneurs as a whole, and of 'mompreneurs' in particular. She recently moved to Lafayette with her husband and family, bringing with her a budding business - Drazil, which makes and distributes healthy teas for kids. She has already reached out to the community and is selling the little drink boxes at Whole Foods and beyond; she is now recruiting and plans to deepen her roots here.

Wheeler is a Wharton business graduate who has always been interested in consumer goods and, from a young age, wanted to start her own business. Upon graduation she worked for General Mills, Procter and Gamble, and lived in Japan for a year and a half. There she deepened her appreciation and knowledge of tea, a beverage she already enjoyed. "In Japan, tea was everywhere. I learned about all different types of tea and opened my eyes to its health benefits," she recalls.

Wheeler's oldest son was suffering from a motor tic disorder and she noticed a correlation with some of the things he ate. "When he had products like Gatorade that have artificial dyes in them, his motor tics would get worse," she explains. She eliminated all of the dyes, colorants, and high fructose corn syrup. Looking for healthy drinks for her kids, she started thinking about tea. "It would have to be caffeine-free and appeal to kids' taste for sweet," she says. She didn't want sugar, sweetener or anything artificial, so she thought about blending in natural fruit juices.

Finding the right formula took some time. The herbal tea she chose as a base is South African Rooibos tea, which contains a wide array of antioxidants - according to webmed.com, Rooibos tea contains 50 percent more antioxidants than are found in green tea. She added rose hips, hibiscus and pomegranate that offer extra benefits and an interesting flavor. The key was to add the right juices in the right quantity to create a drink that would be consistently appreciated by young consumers.

Right now Drazil targets kids age 2 to early teens. The blend is 54 percent herbal tea and 46 percent fruit juice. The teas are brewed at a co-packer's site near Los Angeles. "They have a 100-page manual they have to follow to brew our teas," says Wheeler, who is protective of her process. The teas are mixed with the fruit juices and packaged in a kid-friendly juice box because it keeps the drinks fresh without the use of preservatives. There are four varieties - Grape Bliss, Yummy Berry, Tropical Burst, and Punch Passion.

Wheeler has drawn on the knowledge acquired over the course of her career to create her product and brand. When branding the juice she worked with a design agency, but the name Drazil - lizard spelled backwards - came from the name of a pet lizard given by a child in Wheeler's sister-in-law's elementary school class. She asked Paul Morton, a professional children's book illustrator, to create the graphic. She started the business with her own money, made the rounds of family and friends, and sought funding from angel investors. Additional financing will be needed in the future as the brand expands to the East Coast. At this time Wheeler has several distributors - her teas can be found in select Whole Foods stores and on Amazon.com.

With a new business and young kids, Wheeler does not have a lot of time for sleep, but she

says that she can get by on six hours. To keep her sanity she connects with friends, and makes it a priority to prepare a big breakfast for her kids every day and be there with them in the morning before the hectic day starts. "I also have a large table in the house where I work and the kids can work also," she says. As the company grows, she will be recruiting locally for an experienced sales manager. "We want to grow, but not too quickly," she says. "I've seen too many products fail because they tried to become too big, too fast."

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