



Photos by Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Sassy Henry, with her husband, Brian, started making homemade pimento cheese for tailgating parties at Atlanta Braves games. After moving to Pawleys Island, the couple took that recipe and started Palmetto Cheese.

Say CHEESE!

Couple's flavorful business venture has spread out across the South

By JACKIE R. BROACH
COASTAL OBSERVER

JUST TWO YEARS AGO, Brian and Sassy Henry were ecstatic to be selling 25,000 packages of Palmetto Cheese a year.

That was a big step up from when they launched the product in 2006 with permission to put 20 packages of the pimento cheese in a cooler at Independent Seafood in Georgetown.

They were proud of their success.

Today, the couple easily sells 25,000 packages in a three-week period through stores all over the South, from North Carolina to Texas.

The Henrys, who own and operate the Sea View Inn on Pawleys Island, remain proud of their success. But mostly what they say they feel is overwhelmed.

"It's overwhelmed in a good way, though," Sassy explained.

"We're overwhelmed with appreciation and gratitude for the support we've received."

When they started the business in a small facility on Highway 17 with Sassy's recipe and two employees, they hoped their product would become a local favorite. But they never imagined it would grow as much as it has.

They still have that facility and those same two employees making Palmetto Cheese in small amounts for distribution to a handful of local stores, but most of their production is now done at a facility in Simpsonville. The product made there goes out to grocery chains, including Food Lion, Bi-Lo, Piggly Wiggly, Harris Teeter and Publix.

"We're just floored," Sassy said. "It's been the most amazing grassroots kind of thing. It's been all word of mouth."

The Henrys didn't do any mass marketing. And it was their customers who got Palmetto Cheese on the shelves in many of the stores where it's now found.

"People came here, had it and loved it and asked how to get it in their local grocery stores," Sassy said. "Brian told them to call the stores and ask for it. With that many people calling the Pig or Publix, or wherever, they listened."

tened."

When it came time to significantly increase the amount of Palmetto Cheese being made every month, the Henrys were nervous about the reaction they would get from their manufacturing company, Duke Sandwich Productions. But as it turned out, Duke was more than happy to up the quantities.

"The production manager over there said, 'Awesome! We'll be able to hire more people,'" Sassy recalled. "Our relationship with them is so amazing, it's almost divine. We work so well together and they've made this so easy for us."

According to Brian, there are a lot of things that make Palmetto Cheese special. It's made with real sharp cheddar cheese and Hellmann's mayonnaise, and even though it's being made in larger quantities now, it's still packaged by hand.

But the most important thing is the taste. It has that "just right mix" that's hard to find in pimento cheese, he said.

"A lot of it's too creamy or too mayonnaisey, or they put too many pimentos in it and it has a bad aftertaste," Brian said. "Ours is spicy, but it doesn't have that aftertaste and the texture is just

right. A lot of people love pimento cheese, but people tell me they sit down with a 12-ounce package of our's, and they've eaten the whole thing before they know it."

Sassy, who worked as an executive chef's assistant when she lived in Atlanta, said she started making pimento cheese as a treat for Brian. Brian's mother made pimento cheese and the couple used to pack it for tailgating. Sassy decided to try making her own version.

From the first time she made it, Sassy said she knew she had something. Brian loved it and friends and family raved about it.

But it was Vertrella Brown who helped refine the recipe to what Palmetto Cheese fans have come to crave. Brown's is the face that graces the labels.

Palmetto Cheese is known as "the pimento cheese with soul" and, according to Sassy, it was Brown who gave it the soul. She's one of the cooks at the Sea View Inn.

Brown took over the making of Palmetto Cheese before it hit the market when Sassy started serving it at cookouts and other events at the inn.

"She used the same ingredients,"

"SEE 'CHEESE,' PAGE 19

Recipes

Hash Brown Potato Casserole

INGREDIENTS
1 32-oz package of frozen hash browns
1 10 and 1/2 oz can of chicken soup
1 12-oz container of Palmetto Cheese
1 cup crushed Ritz crackers

PREPARATION
Combine hashbrowns, soup, Palmetto Cheese. Mix well.
Spread into ungreased 7 by 11 inch baking dish.
Cover with crushed Ritz crackers.
Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until crackers are brown and mixture is bubbly.

Palmetto Cheese Biscuits

INGREDIENTS
1 cup Palmetto Cheese
2-1/4 cups self-rising soft-wheat flour
1/2 cup cold butter
1 cup buttermilk self-rising soft-wheat flour
2 tablespoons melted butter

PREPARATION
Place flour in a large bowl.
Cut butter into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Sprinkle butter slices over flour. Cut butter into flour with a pastry blender until crumbly and mixture resembles small peas. Cover and chill 10 minutes.

Add buttermilk and Palmetto Cheese to flour mixture, stirring just until dry ingredients are moistened.

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface; knead three or four times, gradually adding additional flour as needed. With floured hands, press or pat dough into a 3/4-inch-thick rectangle (about 9 by 5 inches). Sprinkle top of dough with additional flour. Fold dough over onto itself in three sections, starting with one short end. (Fold dough rectangle as if folding a letter-size piece of paper.) Repeat entire process two more times, beginning with pressing into a 3/4-inch-thick dough rectangle (about 9 x 5 inches).

Press or pat dough to 1/2-inch thickness on a lightly floured surface; cut with a two-inch round cutter, and place, side by side, on a parchment paper-lined or lightly greased jelly-roll pan. (Dough rounds should touch.)

Bake at 450 degrees for 13 to 15 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove from oven; brush with 2 tbsp. melted butter.

Baked Palmetto Cheese

INGREDIENTS
1 12-oz container of any flavor Palmetto Cheese
Ritz crackers

PREPARATION
Place the Palmetto Cheese in an oven safe casserole dish.

Top with crushed Ritz crackers.

Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes.

Serve with chips.

Recipes from www.palmettocheese.com



In Pawleys Island, local orders of Palmetto Cheese are packaged by hand by workers like Joe Gibbs.



In Simpsonville, Duke Sandwich Productions fills large orders. From left, John F. Mack, Jerane Mote, and Andrew Smart, company president.

☐ Cheese venture keeps spreading

CONTINUED FROM FRONT
Sassy said. "It was my recipe, but we say she put her soulful touch into it and used a little bit more of this or a little less of that and made it better."

Brown and her significant other, George Easterling, still make the cheese at the Pawleys Island facility.

It was another friend who unintentionally came up with the name for the product when he misheard the pronunciation of the word "pimento."

He complimented Sassy on her "palmetto" cheese, and as soon as she heard the words together, she said she knew that's what it should be called.

Palmetto Cheese has developed quite a reputation and the Henrys said they are continually amazed by the feedback they get.

Brian and Sassy personally read all the comments and e-mails that come through the Palmetto Cheese Web site, palmettocheese.com, and many of them are enthusiastic endorsements.

"People are almost cultish over their pimento cheese," Sassy said. "We get e-mails every day from people who say they used to think their pimento cheese was the best, but they're not making it anymore because Palmetto Cheese is better. It's weird how people are so ad-



Photos by Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

John F. Mack, above, vice president of operations at Duke Sandwich Productions, moves a load of Palmetto Cheese that just came off the assembly line, right, at the plant in Simpsonville.

ament about their likes and dislikes."

For those who say they don't like pimento cheese at all, Sassy tells them it's because they haven't had it made the right way.

"Everything in our's is real. There are no fillers and that makes all the difference," she said.

The Henrys hope to see orders for Palmetto Cheese continue to grow and they plan to have their product

line grow with it.

They currently have two kinds of pimento cheese: original and jalapeño.

"We're toying with a few more flavors," Sassy said. "One is with bacon and it's done well on test runs."

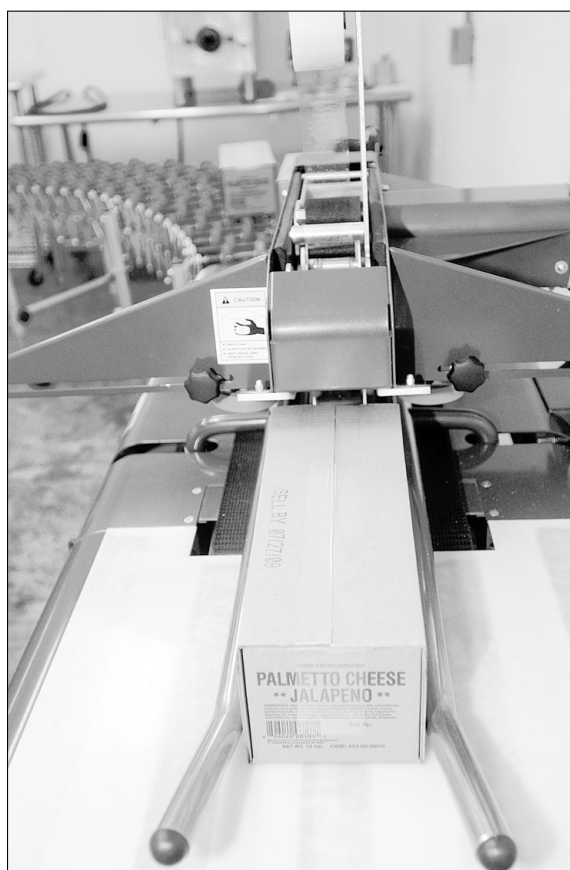
They're also looking at expanding distribution to the Northeast, something they get e-mails about all the time.

"We're looking at chains we could approach to get far-

ther above the Mason-Dixon line," Sassy said.

But they'll make sure quality doesn't suffer with expansion.

"What Brian and I are committed to is growing at a pace we can keep up with," she said. "Right now, we've kind of got our finger on everything and that gives it a homemade, small town feel that people really seem to like. We don't want to lose that."



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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING GEORGETOWN COUNTY WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT FISCAL YEAR 2010 OPERATING AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS BUDGET AND PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF RATES AND CHARGES

Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held before the Board of Directors of the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District at **6:00 PM on Thursday, June 11, 2009**. The hearing will be held at the offices of the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District, located at 4145 Highmarket Street, Georgetown South Carolina. The purpose of the public hearing will be to allow members of the public to express their views regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2010 Operating and Capital Improvements Budget and proposed amendments to the District's schedule of rates and charges. The proposed FY 2010 Operating and Capital Improvements Budget and the proposed schedule of rates and charges are available for inspection at the offices of the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District.

As required by Section 6-1-80, Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended, the public is advised of the following.

1. The budget of the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District for the current fiscal year calls for operating revenues of \$13,770,958, and expenditures of \$13,661,468.
2. The proposed budget of the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District for fiscal year 2010 calls for operating revenues of \$13,367,317, and expenditures of \$13,371,947.
3. The proposed Georgetown County Water and Sewer District fiscal year 2010 represents a 2.1% decrease from the operating budget for the current fiscal year.
4. The proposed schedule of rates and charges for fiscal year 2010 will be presented and is available for inspection at the offices of Georgetown County Water and Sewer District 4145 Highmarket Street, Georgetown, SC and at 456 Clearwater Drive, Pawleys Island, SC.

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