

***From Industrial Ashes, Gourmet Pickles Arise***  
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CHESTER-- In years past, Chester was renowned for its shipyard and its auto-assembly plant - both long since gone. It is still home to manufacturers of everything from bread rolls to tissue paper and chemicals.

Now Stanley and Christine Coleman would like to see their hometown become famous for another product: gourmet pickles.

About three years ago, a good-natured challenge to Stanley Coleman by his father-in-law, Dwight Greene, about who could make the best pickle led Coleman to begin developing his own trademark combination of pickle brine and spices.

After his pickles drew raves, Coleman, who is a quality-control technician at a soft-drink plant in Wilmington, and his wife, an accounts-payable clerk for a company in Linwood, decided to perfect the product and start selling it.

"Comparing what I was making to the products that were already on the market, it seemed that there was room for improvement," Stanley Coleman said. "After a lot of trial and error...I think we've come up with a better pickle."

After the Colemans decided to start marketing their pickles, they found sources for fresh cucumbers and spices, as well as a supply of plastic containers. Then they studied up on sanitary production techniques and started a pickle-making operation in their kitchen, on Fourth Street in Chester's West End.

Since then, with the help of the Chester Microenterprise Partnership, a nonprofit group that helps small businesses gets started, they have secured zoning approval from the city and operating approval from the state Department of Agriculture.

They call their product S&C Gourmet Pickles; their main customers, at this point, are neighbors and coworkers, members of their church, and people who have heard about their business by word of mouth.

S&C pickles are made with uncooked cucumber slices soaked in brine with vinegar, sugar, onions, garlic, dill weed and mustard seed. They are refrigerated for 10 days before being sold, and the finished product, unlike cooked pickles, has to remain refrigerated. The Colemans make both mild and hot varieties (the hot pickles have peppers added to the mix).

"The ingredients are pretty much the standard ones," Stanley Coleman said. "It's the proportions and the fact that uncooked pickles are much crispier that make them unique."

The results, their customers say, are mouthwatering and mouth puckering.

"They're fresh, and they have a distinctive taste that I haven't seen in other pickles," said Reginald Graham, a friend of the Colemans' who has been eating their pickles for about two years. "I can't describe it, but I certainly like it."

With help from their sons Michael, 9 and Isaiah, 11, the Colemans are making about 12 cases - 144 jars - of pickles a week; that's all they can fit in their refrigerator at home.

But the demand far outstrips the supply. "I keep getting calls from people saying, "Don't you have any pickles yet?" Christine Coleman said with a laugh.

So the Colemans are planning to boost production soon. With the help of a loan that the Chester Microenterprise Partnership is helping to arrange, they are planning to buy larger refrigerator that will allow them to produce and store up to 84 cases - about 1,000 jars - a week. By the end of the year, Stanley Coleman hopes to be working full time at the business.

Jim Turner, executive director of the Chester Microenterprise Partnership, said the Colemans seemed to be headed in the right direction,

"They not only have a good product, but they've been very patient, building their business a step as a time," he said. "That's the approach that works the best. They seem to be on the road to success; I think they will go far."