

***Chester Couple Relish Their Shot At Success***  
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CHESTER - It doesn't look like much more than water at the bottom of a big pot in the Coleman family kitchen.

But lower your head and inhale the salty-sweet power. The smell of Stan Coleman's signature elixir and the taste of the pickles it produces back his claim that he has built better brine.

The precise mix of kosher salt, sugar, vinegar and water make S & C Gourmet Pickles unique, Coleman said, since the amounts of vegetables, herbs and spices that help cure the cucumbers are no secret.

"You can see them right in the jar," said Christine Coleman, Stan's wife, president of the start-up family business, and the "C" in "S & C."

Indeed, the onions, garlic, dill weed, mustard seed and bay leaves are plain to see -- the Colemans add a pinch of each per 32-ounce jar. The brine recipe is not so easily discerned.

What's clear, however, is that these West End entrepreneurs have for three years nursed a husband's hobby into a burgeoning small company. From their twin home on Fourth Street, the Colemans plan to soon offer their pickles at a delicatessen near you.

Stan Coleman's start in pickles grew from a culinary curiosity that had him deep-frying turkeys before Emeril Lagasse first shouted an exclamation on cable TV.

Stan, 40, tinkered with store-bought pickles and peppers, added herbs and spices, and at the encouragement of his in-laws, Dwight and Julia Greene, moved onto curing his own fresh cucumbers. "Wow, you could sell these," the chief executive officer recalled his mother-in-law saying.

Stan said it took him about a year to settle on a brine blend and in 1999 they started peddling pickles.

"We had our ups and downs," said Christine, 34, an accounts-payable clerk at Foamex International Inc. in Linwood and a 1984 graduate of Chichester High School. "We had destroyed batches. It took about another year to make everything...flow the way it should."

S & C gourmet Foods, Inc., as the not-yet-incorporated firm is to be named, already has one commercial account, the Ro-Lynn Cold Cut Center on Edgemont Avenue in Brookhaven. The pickles, which come in mild and hot varieties, are found in the refrigerated case.

And as they have done from the start, the Colemans sell the \$5 jars to friends, neighbors, work colleagues and, increasingly, anybody who will taste one.

The Colemans get help on their meticulous assembly line from their sons, Isaiah, 11 and Michael, 9, and a mix of extended family members.

"We always harassed (Stan) for pickles and I never knew what went into making them," said his sister and occasional helper, Zenda Brown of Willingboro, NJ. "Now I know. And it's work."

No matter the labor supply, the Colemans can produce only about 130 jars at a time because that's the capacity of the second-hand refrigerator used for the 10-day curing process. They say demand for pickles runs much higher.

With a loan the company is close to getting from Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Southeastern Pennsylvania, a state-funded economic development organization, the Colemans plan to buy a \$14,000 walk-in refrigerator for their backyard. Capacity: 2,000 jars.

The loan also would pay Stan Coleman a year's salary, enabling him to quit his job as a quality-control technician at the Pepsi bottling plant in Wilmington, Delaware, he said.

He relishes the possibility: "I see where I've just got to...go to people and crack that jar open so they can smell it and taste it. Once they do, it's like a domino effect."

The Colemans credit the Chester Microenterprise Partnership for helping them incorporate, get a license from the state Department of Agriculture and apply for their first loan.

The nonprofit, small business assistance center, affiliated with the Philadelphia Development Partnership also arranged free legal advice from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, they said.

Now as the family venture is about to become more formal and perhaps more lucrative, Stan Coleman, a 1979 Chester High School graduate, finds himself ready to ply pickles permanently.

"I'm motivated. I'm confident," he said. "I feel people like to eat. I know my aspirations are great, to be like other people in business -- Famous Amos, Ben & Jerry's. If they can do it, I can do it,"