



Ken Smith ('85, Business Administration), Certified Cicerone® and Beer Educator The Boston Beer Company, Boston, Mass.



Koel Thome, co-founder of Noosa Yoghurt, Bellvue, Colo.

PROFILE IN BUSINESS

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THE BOSTON BEER COMPANY By Sandra Hume

WHEN KEN SMITH sits down at a restaurant, invariably he gets asked the wrong question:

WHAT CAN I GET YOU TO DRINK?

Not only is the question crazy, Smith says, it's also unanswerable. "I've just sat down. How can I know what I want to drink if I don't know what I'm going to eat yet?" Sure, he could pick a drink and then base his food choice on that. Or, more likely, he'll opt to wait a bit, decide what he's going to eat, then choose a suitable drink to accompany it.

His point? Context matters, whether you're at home or in a restaurant. "If I'm sitting in the sun at a baseball game, I'll drink something a lot different than I would at a barbecue on someone's back deck."

Not a surprising attitude from someone who passed the Certified Cicerone® exam on the first try. The beer equivalent of wine's sommelier, a Cicerone® certification requires passing two of three exhaustive and complex levels of examinations about brewing, storing, serving, and pairing beer—essays and tasting included—that less than half of those taking it pass. Smith became The Boston Beer Company's second Certified Cicerone® in 2010; today, the brewery has 100.

Education, Smith says, has flipped the beverage industry entirely. As a wine distributor after graduating from CSU, he knew a bit more about wine than the average consumer, but not much. He found the same to be true when he switched to The Boston Beer Company in 1995. His required knowledge was in merchandising, not the beverage itself. In truth, there wasn't much to know. The 1980s attitude of wine was all about white zinfandel and jug wine; vodka was Absolut or nothing; beer was Budweiser or Coors, Smith remembers.

Then consumers began to educate themselves. In the beer world, folks on the barstools now knew more about what they were drinking than the people serving it. Chicago brewing expert Ray Daniels saw a need and, endorsed by the Boulder-based Brewers' Association, developed the Cicerone® program in 2008. As a beer educator, part of Smith's job on Boston Beer's training team is to help would-be Cicerones® prepare for the exhaustive test.

Smith loves the interaction of teaching, which also includes CSU's Beverage Business Institute. The side of him that minored in history at CSU revels in the beer factoids he gets to share. Like that refrigeration was invented not for meat, but for beer. Or that the builders of the ancient pyramids were paid in beer — one of the first monetary systems developed. Or that the revolution cementing the very foundation of our country was born right in the taverns of Boston over pints of beer.

After 30 years of witnessing growth and change in the beer industry, Smith couldn't expect more in his career. He recently reduced his travel to "only" 17 or 18 weeks a year, and the guy whose email signature includes a Frank Zappa quote about the importance of beer says he's having more fun than ever. "I don't take things as seriously as I did when I was 25. What I'm doing now, it's exactly what I want to do."



NOOSA FINEST YOGHURT By Sandra Hume

MY FIRST TASTE OF NOOSA YOGHURT was at Copper Mountain. Company representatives were distributing samples in the parking lot. Frantically gathering our ski essentials for the shuttle ride, my husband and I told our sample-obsessed kids sure, fine, get some free yogurt, if they're offering. Have at it.

It wasn't until we returned to the parking lot later, when we got even more samples, that I actually tasted the yogurt. "Isn't it good?" my daughter asked, watching my face. It was, I agreed. And is there any more lemon?

This is an example of the just-taste-it, guerrilla-marketing approach Bellvue-based Noosa has relied on to spread the yogurt word. For five years, Noosa Finest Yoghurt has gambled and won on its unique version of yogurt co-founder Koel Thome discovered in Australia and brought stateside in 2010. The company shares its headquarters in Bellvue, Colorado with Morning Fresh Dairy, which supplies the milk for yogurt production.

The company's first expansion outside Colorado was to the Midwest, which at first made Thome a little nervous. This was a new and different product; would the Midwest embrace a trend? But Noosa was a hit, Thome says. "The lowans know good dairy."

Today Noosa is distributed in all 50 states and at retailers including Target, Kroger, and Whole Foods, though its hooves remain planted in Northern Colorado soil. The company is well entrenched in the community, presenting both monetary and in-kind donations to cycling groups, Fort Collins' before-and-after-school program B.A.S.E. Camp, and the Food Bank of Larimer County (replacing their Kids' Café mayonnaise with plain yogurt).

Noosa still uses Morning Fresh's milk to ferment into 25 million pounds of yogurt each year — about 50 million 8-ounce clear,

rounded flat containers that are the company's signature. And despite last fall's acquisition of the company by Boston-based investment firm Advent International, headquarters will remain in Bellvue. In case anyone needs a reminder, a \$5 million expansion is nearing completion, bringing the yogurt production facility's total footprint to 55,000 square feet.

"Until now we've been very lean and very scrappy," says Thome. "We're happy to have some new digs to call our own." Once the company is out from under a construction schedule, she looks forward to offering tours. "These are fourth-generation dairy farmers, very well known in the area. We know people would love to come out and meet the cows."

New flavors and sizes are rolling out, including "lunchbox" mini-containers and 24-ounce family sizes in plain, honey, and vanilla. Come midsummer, fans can expect the return of pumpkin along with a new seasonal option of cranberry apple.

And about that lemon. Lemon happens to be Thome's favorite flavor, but she knew that as yogurt flavors went, it was a bit ho-hum. So from the start the goal was best-in-class. "We knew the benchmark was low. So we went for the decadent taste, to replicate more of that lemon-tart, lemon-curd filling. Now when people try it, they say, "This isn't lemon yogurt."

EITHER THAT, OR THE BEST LEMON YOGURT EVER.

