

SMART IDEAS

For Just Peanuts?

NO WAY! THESE BROTHERS SELL MUCH MORE THAN BOILED NUTS TO THEIR HARD-CORE SOUTHERN-FOOD FANS.

BY P. KELLY SMITH

WHAT: Mail-order snack foods, Southern-style

WHO: Matthew and Ted Lee of Lee Bros. Boiled Peanuts Catalogue

WHERE: Charleston, South Carolina

WHEN: Started in 1994

"THE IDEA THAT YOU CAN BUILD A SUCCESSFUL business on mail-ordered boiled peanuts is pretty far-fetched," admits Matthew Lee. "But people grow up in places and develop very strong attachments to food." For Matthew, that particular snack of choice is boiled peanuts.

Prior to starting their mail-order business, Matthew and his brother, Ted, were living in New York City, trying to establish careers in art and publishing, respectively. With their professions going nowhere, the pair sought solace in their favorite childhood treat—those unroasted peanuts boiled in salty water and then consumed by cracking open the softened shells and slurping out the contents. But when Matthew couldn't find any in

WHO'S WHO? When Tania Calley couldn't tell her son's scooter apart from the rest, she designed decals to customize his ride.



SOUTHERN COMFORT FOOD: Benne wafers, crecky greens, pickled okra—you name the Southern specialty food, and Matthew (l.) and Ted Lee sell it.

New York, it dawned on him that other transplanted Southerners probably had a hard time finding their favorite Southern foods, too.

So, Matthew, 32, and Ted, 30, moved back to their hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, to set up shop. Start-up costs—"entirely bootstrapped," says Matthew—consisted of \$20 for a 25-pound box of raw peanuts. After the success of their catalog, in 1996 the Lee brothers also decided to build a Web site (www.boiledpeanuts.com).

Serving a niche market with few competitors has paid off for the company, whose 40-product catalog features a variety of Southern-style foods, including fig preserves,

artichoke relish, pickled peaches and—of course—boiled peanuts.

With \$150,000 in sales projected for 2001, they're not millionaires yet, but these brothers insist they're right where they want to be. "We're happy to have this catalog held close to us and be privately run," Matthew says. "Our goal is slow growth—not Internet riches. I hope this thing is going to be chugging away 50 years from now."

Scooter Happy

WHAT: Colorful decals for scooters

WHO: Tania Calley of Brennick Inc.

WHERE: Laguna Niguel, California

WHEN: Started in 2000

TANIA CALLEY HAS TO BE THE COOLEST mom on the block. Since founding her business last April, she's brightened neighborhoods nationwide with her Scooter Tattoos, a line of colorful decals for inline scooters. The idea originally struck Calley, 35, as a way to set her son's scooter apart from others in the neighborhood.

Available in six fun patterns—like Aloha Red and Flower Power Blue—the easily removable decals retail for about \$8 each and are sold at toy and sporting goods stores. Profits are rolling in, and Calley expects \$100,000 in 2001 sales.

"It's all about timing and keeping things fresh," Calley says. "I was quick to act." ■



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