

A NEW TWIST

A CHICAGO COUPLE USES PRETZEL LOGIC TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WITH SWEET PROJECTIONS.

BY APRIL Y. PENNINGTON

VITAL STATS: Kimberly and Scott Holstein, 37 and 38, co-founders of Kim & Scott's Gourmet Pretzels

COMPANY: Chicago-based gourmet pretzel manufacturer

2004 PROJECTED SALES: more than \$6 million

Twist of Fate: Within a week of meeting Scott in 1994, Kimberly shared her love of combining sweet and salty snacks and the idea of spicing up traditional soft pretzels with different flavors. After Scott painted a flying pretzel on a piggy bank for her, with the inscription "Dreams made upon deposit will come true," the couple decided to make the dream a reality.

Prime Location: The Holsteins launched their business in 1995, keeping pretzels in two freezer chests in their Lincoln Park apartment, which was surrounded by a perfect testing ground of coffee shops, bars and restaurants. Initially hiring a bakery, they opened their own pretzel bakery within nine months to keep up with demand.

Tastemakers: With 20 flavors as varied as apple pie and spinach with feta cheese, their pretzels are sold nationwide in gourmet delis and cafes, as well as inside Barnes & Noble, Borders, movie theaters, Starbucks and at NASCAR races. Their big break: Winning a QVC invention contest in 2002 landed them airtime. The couple sold 120,000 pretzels in their first two appearances, which helped them land sales with national coffee chains/cafes and grocery delis, and sent sales skyrocketing on their Web site.

Social Club: The Holsteins will open their first pretzel bakery cafe in the Chicago suburbs in fall 2005. Kids will be able to twist their own pretzels and dine on pretzel sandwiches. And the couple has another passion: Pretzels for Peace. Influenced by the Ben & Jerry's franchise his family owned, Scott says the company's initiative is to "bring peace [to] the world, through education and making a difference." A portion of the profits goes toward children's programs, including classes in their bakery about pretzels and entrepreneurship. ■

"We're really inspired by entrepreneurs who can make money and make a difference."



PHOTO: SHANE KISHAN