

Barleans Organic Oils

Adding the pressing of flaxseed to the family's fishing business was one small step for the Barlean family, one giant leap for omega-3 fatty acids

Bruce Barlean, founder/owner and past president of Barlean's Organic Oils of Ferndale, Washington, first learned about the value of omega-3 fatty acids in the 1980s when he was working as a pressman for a local company that produced flax seed oil. Says Bruce, "Flax seed oil is full of omega-3s, and I began reading about their health benefits. I was pretty amazed, so I started sharing the literature with my family."

Bruce's parents, Dave and Barbara, were impressed. And they had reason to be. Omega-3 fatty acids are essential to good health, playing an integral role in everything from cell communication, to balancing hormones and supporting memory. Yet today's Western eating habits have left a good number of people woefully deficient in these fatty acids. Bruce and his family learned that one tablespoon of flax seed oil contains 5000 milligrams of omega-3 and is more efficient at replenishing the body's essential fatty acid needs than fish oil, which is also chock-full of omega-3s.

Interestingly enough, the Barlean family unknowingly had been supplying local residents with these rich fatty acids through their successful fishing company. The Barleans had been selling freshly caught fish since 1972 via a direct-order concept: consumers ordered their fish before the ship went out, and they picked up their order the day the catch came in. Freshness was guaranteed.

About the time Bruce's stint as a flax seed press operator was coming to an end, the fishing industry was starting to slump, and Dave Barlean—always an intrepid inventor and entrepreneur—started thinking about other ways to raise money. Says Bruce, "My dad said to me, 'If even half the stuff about flax seeds and omega-3s is true, then there's amazing potential here.' He asked me if I thought I could sell a good amount of flax seed oil if he provided the equipment to press it." Bruce's answer was yes, and his father not only provided the

equipment, he built it himself. The result was a "kinder, gentler" press that produced a mild nutty-tasting oil, which surpassed the stronger, oftentimes bitter taste of other flax seed oils being produced at the time. When one of

the world's top authorities on omega-3s, Dr. Johanna Budwig of Germany, pronounced the oil superior, the Barleans knew they had a winner.

"When we first started the business, it was more of an experiment," says Bruce. "Flax seed is one of the most difficult things to press and still retain its quality. But we made it work. In fact, things turned out at least 25% better than we ever hoped for." That is, perhaps, an understatement. The company, which was officially founded in 1989, is now the biggest producer of flax seed oil for human consumption in the world.

The "produce-on-demand" philosophy that had been central to the Barlean fishing business, now forms the foundation for Barlean's Organic Oils. One of the characteristics that distinguishes the Barlean's product from similar ones is that its freshness is optimized by pressing the flax seed on the same day the order is received, then sending it out the next morning by two- to three-day air delivery. Each bottle is stamped with a freshness expiration date, so consumers will be clued into when their oil will begin losing its nutritional efficacy.

"Our number one goal is to never compromise on quality," says Bruce. "We're relentless about never cutting corners. We actually sacrifice close to 35% of the oil and seed to maintain peak quality."

The Barlean's reputation for purity is one of the reasons consumers are drawn to the company. The other is the education it provides. "We have no real marketing and advertising budget, but we send out loads of educational materials," says Bruce. "It's all about educating the public on the health benefits of flax seed omega-3s. When we first started out,



Bruce (left) and Dave Barlean (right) during a visit to the Bastyr herb garden



most of our customers were people who were already ill and were looking for ways to improve their health. Now the majority of buyers recognize the value of flax seed oil in maintaining health and preventing disease.”

This dedication to education and a proactive approach to health is reflected in the Barlean family’s staunch support of Bastyr University. “I’ve been involved with Bastyr in various ways since the early ‘90s,” says Bruce. “I believe in its mission, and whenever you get to participate in a great mission, it’s an honor. The university’s graduates have a passion for helping people through nutritional wellness and wholeness.”

Bruce is excited about Bastyr’s future yet is aware of the financial burdens so often associated with growth. “I believe Bastyr is a light of knowledge and education for the world,” he says, “but the university has to rely on folks like me who share its vision and are willing to help support it. I can’t contribute time, but I can contribute financially, and my heart is with the school.”

Bruce shares his heart with more than Bastyr. Only recently he established the Barlean’s Breast Cancer Prevention Foundation, and he launched “Brevail,” a product made from lignans isolated from flax and designed to promote breast health. “My goal is to continue developing other helpful nutrition products unique to the industry,” says Bruce.

Last year saw the fulfillment of another of Bruce’s heart-felt goals. After 15 years as the president of Barlean’s Organic Oils, he handed over the presidential reins in order to become his church’s full-time youth pastor. “I’m absolutely passionate about youth ministries,” he says.

His commitment to edifying young minds and hearts is no surprise considering the Barlean family’s principles for doing business: “Always strive for the best. Always look for new ways to make things better. Always tell the truth.”

Says Bruce, “In the long run, it’s really all about your character.” And what Bruce says about the physical merits of flax seed oil could very well be a metaphor for his commitment to spiritual health: “First beautify the inside, then the outside will follow.”

Board Spotlight continued

“That man is like an encyclopedia. He put me on a nutritional regime that’s so good I’m still on it today,” says Schuchart, who considers himself one of Mitchell’s success stories and certainly one of his biggest fans. “Dr. Mitchell reinvented the quality of my blood. He saved my life, no question.”

It was Rolfe who also invited Schuchart to join the Bastyr board of regents of which she herself is a member. “I give her 105 percent of the credit for getting me involved with the university. Prudy invited me to join the board, and she was insistent. I think part of it was because she wanted someone to help drive her to the meetings,” Schuchart laughs. “She just wouldn’t let me say no.”

Now a regent, Schuchart sees his role as one of ambassador for the university as well as natural health. “I encourage people who are having physical difficulties, so often resulting from their diets, to change their lifestyle. The naturopathic approach is a results-oriented approach.” He finds the university to be results-oriented as well, and he hopes his efforts will contribute positively to its future. “The school certainly has a very successful curriculum,” he says. “Its graduates are very capable performers who understand the blending of natural therapies with medical treatments in a practical way.”

Building Character

Schuchart confesses to often sitting in the Bastyr cafeteria and just listening to the conversations of the students. He’s fond of bright and motivated young people, the kind who throw their hearts and minds into making their dreams come true. “Those are the students Bastyr attracts,” he says. “I enjoy the energy, the knowledge and the many interests they have. They’re there because they want to be.”

According to Judy Schuchart, her husband considers his greatest accomplishment to be his children. And in his children, he has instilled a deep appreciation for education, responsibility and kindness to others. Continuing the Schuchart construction dynasty is George and Judy’s son, George S. Schuchart, Jr., who runs his own construction firm, Schuchart Corporation. George Sr. seems just as happy now to have his son follow in his footsteps as he is to have traded his own career for a life where he can sit back a bit and enjoy watching his children’s success—whether that success be in business or the raising of happy families and contributing to the greater community, as his three grown daughters are doing.

It seems clear that, while Schuchart may be famous for constructing buildings and changing skylines, his legacy is more about building character and helping to create people who can change the world. “If I were to describe my husband in just a word or two,” says Judy, “I’d say George is a caring man. Yes, such a caring man.” And if anyone should know the true George S. Schuchart, Sr., it would be the former Judy Jones from down the street.