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Arkansas' first bean-to-bar chocolate maker doubles capacity

Kyya Chocolate's growth brings attention to Elm Springs

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS—There will soon be literally tons more single-origin chocolate in the four-state region as Arkansas's first bean-to-bar chocolatier recently doubled its manufacturing capacity and space. Kyya Chocolate announced this week that it purchased a second facility near its current shop in Elm Springs, as well as four more chocolate-making machines (aka conches) and more processing tanks.

Both the four new conches and the facility were purchased in the last 30 days.

Co-owner Rick Boosey said the company's chocolate-producing capacity will now be an estimated 4,800 pounds of chocolate in its various forms. That is 27 tons of chocolate each year, which more than doubles Kyya's previous production.

"We're not kids anymore," he said. "We are growing faster than most chocolate makers in the country."

Boosey added that they project a 50 percent year-over-year annual growth in sales.

The \$225,000 investment in the new manufacturing facility includes the building purchase, renovations and upgrades. Kyya's existing facility, at 337 Main Street, will be used almost solely for retail, classes and school tours. Some manufacturing will remain at the current facility, Boosey explained, which allows the company to continue demonstrating the chocolate production process. The new manufacturing facility will be entirely dedicated to chocolate bar, syrups and BonBon production. The total manufacturing space will now be about 6,000 square feet.

Kyya also now employs 16 people, including full and part-time employees. This is up from 10 employees less than a year ago. They will soon be hiring more individuals to help with classes and school trips. In the last year, Kyya has hosted more than 250 people in classes and more than 1,500 school children for

tours. By moving most of their production to a new location, they will have room for more visitors, tours and classes. Classes will begin in early November.

The company's chocolate and chocolate-related products can be found in many coffee shops and organic food stores throughout Northwest Arkansas. They started selling in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas last year. The focus is now expanding their distribution to more stores in the region.

"We keep picking up new customers and expanding into new markets," Boosey said.

Kyya's growth also attracts more attention to the small town of Elm Springs. Mayor Harold Douthit said he's pleased with the growth Kyya's experienced and that they choose to call Elm Springs home. He hopes it will help promote the idea of growth in the city.

"We're at the crosshairs of development," he said. "We really want to promote the potential growth here."

With cities like Springdale and Bentonville being so close, it has been difficult to attract national chains such as Walmart and Casey's General Stores. What really can thrive at this time in Elm Springs are specialty businesses, such as Kyya Chocolate, Douthit said. The city is also working to expand its residential capacity, with nearly 190 new lots for residential construction approved recently.

About Kyya Chocolate

Founded in 2012 and located in Elm Springs, Ark., Kyya Chocolate was the first bean-to-bar chocolatier in Arkansas. They now offer single-origin bars in 35 varieties, nibs, BonBons, chocolate powders, and chocolate syrups.

Kyya purchases most of its beans from Uganda, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Madagascar, and Ecuador. Most of their beans are purchased through fair-trade brokers. Kyya recently started to purchase beans directly from farmers in Costa Rica and Haiti, Belize and Ecuador.

The FDA requires that cocoa beans are fermented before entering the country, which means Kyya has had to work with farmers to develop and perfect the fermentation process before purchasing beans directly from the farmers. They pay the farmers better than fair-trade prices and a portion of their profits are donated back to the communities where the farmers from whom they purchase beans live.

Kyya offers their chocolate bars in more than 180 retail locations throughout Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas. They also sell their bars on Kyyachocolate.com.