

A SWEET CAREER ALREADY UNDERWAY

Business Student's Candy Company Featured on Food Network

By Teresa Mariani Hendrix



Cal Poly student Leah Post (right) and business partner Brandon Weimer at their Brandini Toffee outlet in Southern California

Photos courtesy Leah Post

Some Cal Poly students launch their own businesses while they're still earning their degrees. Business sophomore Leah Post started even earlier: when she was still in high school.

The company she co-founded, Brandini Toffee, is going strong four years later – and even recently notched an appearance on The Food Network's "Chef vs. City" show. And Post and her partner have plans to continue expanding their business after they earn their degrees.

Post is heading into her second year of classes at Cal Poly's Orfalea College of Business this fall.

She and lifelong friend Brandon Weimer (a business sophomore at University of Arizona) launched Brandini in 2006 to pay their way on a class trip when they were 15-year-olds in La Quinta, Calif.

Post is now the business, public relations and marketing face for the company, and Weimer is the chef and developer of their expanding gourmet product line.

For their July 23 "Chef vs. City" appearance, the duo hosted some of the network's and nation's top chefs in their Brandini Toffee kitchens and judged them as they made toffee.

"The chefs came to our shop, and we had to make sure they made toffee up to our standards," Post said. "We have really high standards."

It wasn't the first national TV appearance for the duo. They appeared on the Martha Stewart Show in 2008 and taught her to make their toffee. And Brandini has more publicity lined up: Post and Weimer have been named to the Palm Springs Life magazine's "40 Under 40" list.

Back in 2006, the duo used Weimer's toffee recipe and baked and packaged the gourmet treat in the kitchen of a local hotel managed by Weimer's father.

After making their first batches, they set up a web site and sent family and friends a link to the site to order. Their e-mails got forwarded far and wide. They started working after school and weekends to fill orders and then began selling at street fairs across Southern California.

In 2008 their toffee beat out 2,500 other entries and won the Gold Sofi Award – a specialty food industry Oscar – in the category of "Outstanding Chocolate."

Last December – during Post's winter break from Cal Poly – they opened a manufacturing plant and gourmet candy shop in Rancho Mirage. Their web-based business ships candy around the world and puts together custom tins and packages under corporate logos for company holiday gifts. They employ about two dozen people during peak candy sales season in the fall. Their products are also sold in locations across Southern California.

Their mothers now work for Brandini Toffee while Post and Weimer are away at college, and Post's father helps with their Web site. "We're all learning as we're growing," Post said.

Cal Poly's learn-by-doing philosophy is one of the reasons Post chose the Orfalea College of Business.

"My dad was a big influence. He really wanted me to go here," she said. "Once I started reading about the Orfalea College of Business and how Mr. Orfalea donated the money to the college, and then when I saw the campus and heard more about learn by doing, everything seemed to fit together here."

Pre-toffee, Post thought she wanted to be an engineer. "I was really into robotics," she said. Her



Post during a news interview at Brandini Toffee

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booming candy company, though, changed her path to business. Now, she and Weimer want to graduate and see if they can continue to grow Brandini Toffee.



"We don't know what's going to happen to the business in the future," she said. "We're just trying to get the name out there. But we've only been in business four years, and we've already accomplished more than a lot of small businesses ever have."

Read more about Post on her company web site at www.brandinitoffee.com.

Find out more about the Chefs vs. City episode at <http://www.foodnetwork.com/chefs-vs-city/index.html>.

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