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Business Student's Candy Company Featured on Food Network July 23

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- A Cal Poly business sophomore and her booming gourmet candy company will be featured on The Food Network show "Chefs vs. City" on Friday, July 23.

Leah Post is heading into her second year of classes at Cal Poly's Orfalea College of Business this fall. She's already a successful entrepreneur; she and lifelong friend Brandon Weimer (about to be a sophomore at University of Arizona) launched Brandini Toffee, a gourmet candy business, to pay their way on a class trip as 15-year-olds in 2006.



Cal Poly business student Leah Post (l) with famed chef Jacques Pepin at the Sofi Awards in New York in 2008

Photo courtesy Brandini Toffee

Post is now the business, public relations and marketing face of Brandini, and Weimer the chef and developer of their expanding gourmet product line. It's not the first

national TV appearance for the duo. They appeared on the Martha Stewart Show in 2008 and taught her to make their toffee.

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

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

The network show was taped in April. Post's business will get more publicity soon; the duo have been named to the Palm Springs Life magazine's "40 Under 40" list.

Post and Weimer are the co-founders of the business and currently plan to finish school and then expand it.

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

They set up a web site and then sent family and friends a link to the site to order. Their e-mails got forwarded far and wide. As orders came in from friends of friends, the teens were working constantly to make toffee to fill orders, and they started 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.”

They now have a manufacturing plant and gourmet candy shop in Rancho Mirage and a web-based business that ships candy around the world, 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 candy is 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,” she said.

Cal Poly's learn-by-doing philosophy is one of the reasons she chose the university's Orfalea College of Business. “My dad was a big influence. He really wanted me to go here. 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 booming candy company changed her path to business. She and Weimer want to graduate and see if they can grow Brandini Toffee even further.

“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>.

For news about other Cal Poly students' success, go to <http://www.calpolynews.calpoly.edu/student-success.html>.



Leah Post (l) is interviewed at her candy shop opening in 2009.

Photo courtesy Brandini Toffee

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