

Profile: Liz Roquet and Lizzy's Fresh Coffee bio by: JIMARICE, Ph.D. business

Ask Liz Roquet why she likes coffee, and she'll wax poetic. "A great cup of coffee has a taste, a look, a texture," she exclaims, with some small embarrassment at her enthusiasm. "The caffeine hit is only a small part of what a coffee drinker should experience as total sensory fulfillment," she adds.

To express her passion, Liz recently founded Lizzy's Fresh Coffee, an internet business that sells five specialty coffee blends, including organic and fair trade blends. With names like "Bad Dog," "Swinger," and "Easy Tiger," each coffee offers a particular taste created by Liz for the discerning palate. The coffees are fresh roasted to order and immediately packed and shipped to customers around the country.

Liz also has an internet wholesale operation, Gem Coffee, which sells private label coffee blends. She operates both businesses from a spacious Ketchum office which houses her roaster, packaging area, pick-up station for local coffee buyers, and place to serve sample coffees to Wednesday afternoon visitors. Liz wasn't always an entrepreneur. Prior to opening Lizzy's Fresh Coffee a year ago, she had been U.S. Operations Manager for four months at Icebreaker, the sports clothing manufacturer headquartered in Ketchum. Before that, she'd been at Smith Optics for 15 years. When Icebreaker moved to Portland, Liz opted to re-main in the valley.

"There's opportunity in everything," Liz points out. "I'd always wanted to start my own business, not knowing what it should be, but without a job I got more focused." She'd been roasting coffee at home for a decade for the fun of it; one day it dawned on her to start a coffee "I love business and I love coffee," she explains. "It just felt natural. My dad was a pastry chef and we'd traveled a lot in Europe where coffee was part of the scene. I knew I didn't want a café, however, my goal was to sell the freshest packaged coffee possible."

Liz, a pragmatic person, was systematic in founding Lizzy's Fresh Coffee. "I used software to write a business plan and then took five months trying to break it. That was important. The software boxes you in so that you really have to figure out if your idea can work. Otherwise, you can be in fantasy-land." She laughs now about having three meltdowns, believing the business wouldn't be possible but each time going back to the basics to rebuild her plan in a more viable way. Liz found it particularly challenging to buy the \$50,000 pollution-free specialty roaster that she preferred. Her husband helped keep her grounded. "What's the worst that can happen?" she recalls him asking. "If it fails, you can dismantle, sell the equipment, and get a job. You're not going to die."

Constant fine-tuning also helps Liz with occasional anxiety. "I work my butt off every day: trying new blends, different roasting techniques, and new marketing strategies." Liz describes the market advantage for Lizzy's Fresh Coffee as roasting fresh to a

customer's order. For her, coffee should never be a commodity. Rather, "it's like a baked good that deteriorates quickly," she explains. "Once past two weeks, you lose the subtle flavors that it creates."



Liz Roquet, owner of Lizzy's Fresh Coffee, pours fair trade, organic coffee beans into her specialty roaster. PHoto: JIMA RICE

Liz also appreciates the science of roasting, i.e. the knowledge of what happens to a coffee bean under heat. "It's a chemical evolution along a continuum from caramelized to carbonized," she notes. "You've got to control the process to generate a particular taste. Basically, you can destroy a coffee or make it shine by the roasting process," she emphasizes. Liz points out that some people take their coffee "very seriously" but she's not that type of person. Coffee should be "fun" she says, not just for her but for her customers, hence her "label of the month" contest with its often quirky and amusing results. Visitors to Lizzy's Fresh Coffee Wednesday open house get that fun feeling, too. People drop by to say hi, and Liz spins out a cup of hot, fresh roasted java, "embraced" (her word) by a creamy froth in a graceful rosette shape. Suddenly, you understand and are grateful for Liz's poetry and the multisensory experience of her coffee.

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