

Young Clinton Township entrepreneurs bringing tea time to Festival of Senses

- By Barb Pert Templeton For The Macomb Daily

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Cody Wallace, a 19-year-old Chippewa Valley High School graduate, has launched his own subscription tea business, 'Taste of Tea.'

Photo courtesy of CODY WALLACE
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There is such a thing as having a love affair with tea, especially since it's a morning ritual for so many.

Among those are Cody Wallace, 19, who has enjoyed a warm cup to start his day since he was quite young.

"It all starts with a memory, and in wanting to share that memory with others," Wallace said. "I was in high school when the thought of creating a company that could help others uncover the teas that defined our lives was initially created."

Flash forward several years and Wallace, of Clinton Township, has started Taste Of Tea, with his business partner, Noah Cannon, 20, a fellow Chippewa Valley High School graduate.

An online, subscription-based firm, customers can choose from dozens of different loose teas that can be used for both hot and cold beverages and purchased individually or in monthly increments. The selection even boasts teas for kids including a fruit smoothie and a bubblegum flavor.

Each subscription package includes 60 grams of a variety of blended loose teas - four unique teas in each package - with enough provided to make 25 cups, a reusable stainless-steel steeper and a fun informative postcard with tips about the flavors. The month to month plan is just \$15 and shipping is free for all orders that exceed \$10.

Many competitors in the tea industry use machine driven production to eliminate the steps required to create a special blend but Taste of Tea doesn't embrace that method. Instead, they carefully roll or shape whole tea leaves into various sizes and styles depending on the type of tea being produced, then blend in their finest ingredients,

"We work with farmers around the world to provide the best quality selections and we blend a lot of it ourselves," Wallace said.

Sharing a love of the blends

An entrepreneur since he was in middle school, Wallace starting out doing web design before moving onto purchasing imported items cheap and reselling them online and later, peddling things on eBay. He also enjoyed a stint working from home as a call center for Pizza Hut taking food orders over the phone.

After graduating from high school and heading to Macomb Community College to study architecture Wallace began forming a plan to create a business based on one of his favorite drinks.

"My family always drank tea and I did too, I used to take it to school with me, I really like it a lot," Wallace said. "So, I started thinking about how tea brings people together in different cultures and I did some research and thought why not a tea subscription box business?"

Once the plan was on paper, Wallace and Cannon setup a Kickstarter account online asking people to donate so they could launch their business. In 30 days, they had over \$1,000 of startup cash. Next, they setup the website where Wallace admits things started off slow.

“We worked with some wholesalers at first and it wasn’t going that well but we’ve got an investor now and are doing some events, we just had a booth at the Romeo Peach Festival and did really, really well, so it’s going better now and I’m really optimistic,” Wallace said.

While Wallace remains the founder, promoter and design director he calls Cannon “the brains of the business” always there to tell him when his ideas are crazy.

“I feel that a challenge of ours has been finding and earning the trust of our customers since we are a new business with a unique product,” Cannon said. “And also, the stress of Cody and myself having to run all the aspects of the business.”

Despite the bumpy beginning, both of these young men see a promising future brewing for their startup.

“I hope to see Taste Of Tea as a brand known throughout the United States, for our quality product, great customer service, and commitment to our communities,” Cannon said.

“It’s a journey, but a wonderful way for people to learn and experience all new teas,” Wallace added.

To try out some blends offered by Taste Of Tea visit their booth at the upcoming Festival of the Senses in Clinton Township this weekend. Wallace said they plan to unveil some fall teas including Crafty Apple, an Apple Spiced Black and a hot Pumpkin Spice.

To find out more about Taste Of Tea, including ordering a subscription, visit them online at tasteoftea.co