

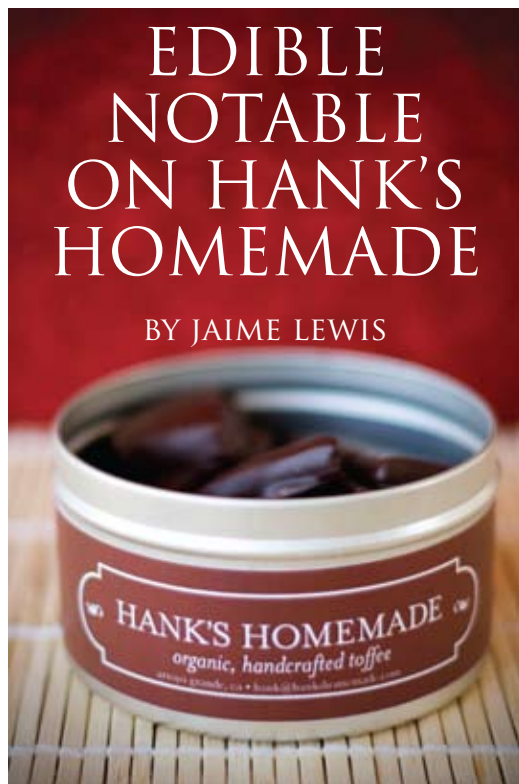
Meet Hank Wethington, your new favorite guy in the whole world. Not only does Hank have the sort of cheerful face that would be right at home in a Norman Rockwell painting, but he is the man behind rich, responsibly-sourced and ridiculously good toffee made right here on the Central Coast. All together now: swoon.

Hank's Homemade started in 2007 when 38-year-old Hank tasted a toffee that he considered the best he'd ever had. It took him 10 months in the kitchen to recreate that experience. "I continued to improve the recipe, using my co-workers as guinea pigs. I even went so far as to conduct a survey to see what flavor combos worked best." Eventually, his colleagues at Level Studios — where he is a Systems Engineer by day — started asking if they could buy the stuff. "I figured, if someone was going to purchase the toffee, then I wanted to do it correctly; proper packaging, quality and uniqueness. Next thing I knew, Hank's Homemade was born."

Each attractive tin of Hank's Homemade contains a half-pound of gloriously decadent chocolate-covered toffee hunks made entirely from organic and fair-trade ingredients. Where possible, he sources locally, too (as in chocolate from Sweet Earth in San Luis Obispo). When asked what inspired him to make Hank's Homemade with an emphasis on conscientiously-produced ingredients, he cites responsibility as a business person and his own lifestyle. "I try to eat organic foods where possible, and have found it's important to others too. Candy is one thing that is often not produced organically, maybe due to candy being considered 'bad.' I feel that candy can be a non-guilty pleasure, so Hank's Homemade is made organically." He adds, "Now if I could only make it calorie-free!"

Since the company's launch, Hank's Homemade has doubled its sales year over year — something Hank considers both a huge blessing and an overwhelming challenge. Last Christmas was an especially burdensome time as Hank, his wife Heather, and two sons Harrison and Hayden worked long hours in their certified kitchen to meet customer demands. But plans are underway to build more infrastructure to sustain growth. "We've started the year with a greater focus to grow Hank's Homemade both online and locally. We're getting ready to launch a new web site, working with some local stores to carry our toffee and planning to attend some local farmers markets."

Covered in your choice of either milk chocolate, dark or special dark chocolate — with or without crushed pecans on top — Hank's Homemade toffee is the kind of blissful confection that makes supporting a local business deliciously easy. To make your order, visit www.hankshomemade.com.



EDIBLE NOTABLE ON HANK'S HOMEMADE

BY JAIME LEWIS

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says that most of his bees are in or around Fresno, where he drives from Atascadero nearly every other day. "I have two helpers who run my booth at eight farmers' markets throughout the week so I can be out in the field," he explains. It's obvious he's a busy man; I call three times with follow-up questions only to hear his answering machine singing back at me, "Let me tell you 'bout the birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees..."

I take a jar of Stoltey's alfalfa honey home and hunt for recipes that will let it shine. Of course, it's delicious without manipulation, whether atop fresh yogurt or as a tea-sweetener. But I try my hand at a recipe for honey whole wheat bread that also makes use of some fresh local khorosan wheat I've just acquired (see "Follow-Up: Bringing Wheat Back To Our Backyard, Part II"). Holy cannoli: I've never had a better slice of whole wheat than this, even from a professional bakery. The sweet, distinctive flavor of Stoltey's

alfalfa honey sings out above a panoply of John DeRosier's rustic grains, a toothsome crumb, and a toasty golden crust. I consider sharing my second loaf with someone who will appreciate it and decide, rather selfishly, to squirrel it away in the freezer.

The fact that our local honeybees have year-round blossoms to gather from on the central coast further reinforces my belief that we are the most blessed eaters on earth. The moment the first spring leaves emerge on the trees, I will be at Mr. Stoltey's booth itching for a taste of his seasonal almond, avocado, wildflower, lavender and eucalyptus honeys. There are so many things I've yet to try, like drizzling honey over vanilla ice cream or serving it with a traditional balsamic vinegar with strawberries in the summer. At the very least, I'll definitely be baking that whole wheat bread again. And who knows? Maybe next time I'll share.

Resources

www.honey.com: The National Honey Board offers plenty of information on honey and its benefits, as well as hundreds of recipes.

Stoltey's Bee Farm, Paul and Jean Stoltey: 10080 Atascadero Ave, Atascadero, CA 93422. Phone: 466-0473.

Classic Honey Mustard Dressing

(adapted from www.honey.com)

Makes 2-1/2 cups

1-1/4 cups mayonnaise
(homemade or store-bought)
1/3 cup honey
1 Tablespoon vinegar
2/3 cup vegetable oil
1 teaspoon onion flakes

2 Tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
2 Tablespoons prepared mustard

In small bowl, whisk together all ingredients until blended. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.