



CB's Nuts retail shop is a converted old fire station. Tyler Shuey/North Kitsap Herald photos



# Peanut of an idea a good kind of shell company

By Tyler Shuey  
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What started out as a peanut of an idea quickly and exponentially turned into a highly sought-after nut business near Kingston.

Clark and Tami Bowen opened CB's Nuts in 2007 near Kingston. There is a retail shop off Highway 104 and a wholesale production facility down the road in a business park.

The business prides itself on providing the freshest peanuts to folks all around the world, grown by responsible farmers. They are committed to USA-grown peanuts but recently found they need to procure from other countries such as Argentina and Mexico due to climate change and droughts in southern states.

Their products consist of peanuts (in-shell and kettle roasted), almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamias, pistachios, pecans and mixed nuts. Many come in different flavors. They also make and sell peanut butter and nut butter, along with sweet treats like Jacker Snackers, peanut butter sandwich cookies and peanut brittle.

Only peanuts and peanut butter are offered wholesale while other items, along with the peanut products, can be purchased at the retail shop. All of their tree nuts are roasted and butters processed in the retail shop to keep them separate from the peanut roasting facility to any potential cross-contamination concerns.

"Because of the allergen concerns with nuts in general we're only able to process peanuts in our manufacturing facility because they're wholesale," Tami said. "That shop is just retail only."

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CB's Nuts peanut products can be found at places such as Town & Country markets, Safeway, QFC, Fred Meyer, PCC Community Markets, Whole Foods (nationwide), Amazon, other businesses and breweries in Washington and their retail shop.

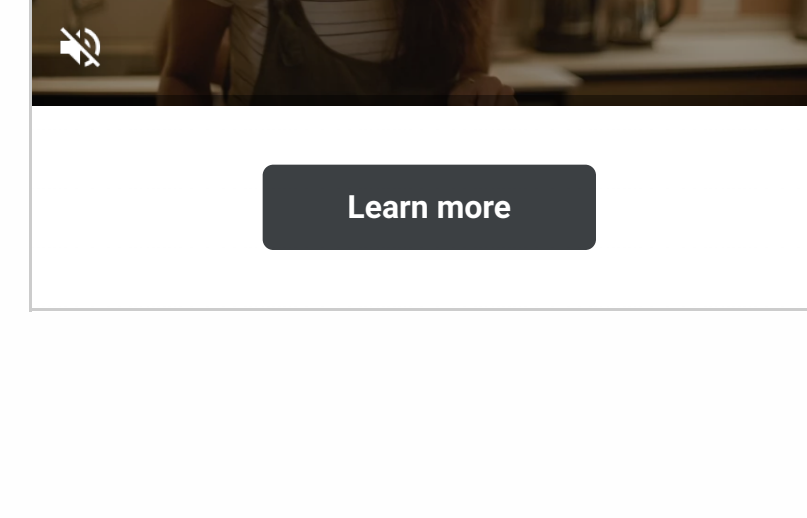
"We barrel roast everything, which adds to the even roasting of the nuts and really draws out the oils," Tami said, adding that most companies use conveyors so nuts don't get an even roasting. "It just adds to the flavor profile. Everything is fresh. Really, it's just a focus on the quality. The more they're exposed to oxygen, the more their quality deteriorates."

An idea is born

It all started with Clark, who was a big Seattle Mariners fan growing up in Eastern Washington. When watching games, he would enjoy eating peanuts, as many people do.

"Peanuts were the healthy snack his mom let him eat without asking," Tami said. "When it was hot in the summer, he'd sit down in the basement TV room, eat peanuts and watch the Mariners play baseball."

As Clark grew older, he noticed the quality of one of his go-to brands of peanuts had changed significantly and were not as fresh. His mission was to figure out how to find fresh peanuts, like the ones he tasted as a child.



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In the early 2000s, Clark went to see the M's play in Baltimore at Camden Yards while on a business trip. He tried some peanuts and that longing taste came back to him. They were freshly harvested and roasted in the Carolinas.

"It blew his mind," Tami said. "It was his epiphany moment. This is what peanuts are supposed to taste like."

Filled with determination, Clark spent one summer in Southern California at a Hispanic flea market where peanuts are a big go-to snack. He learned to roast peanuts from one of the vendors there.

He came back up to Seattle and started selling hot and fresh peanuts outside of Mariner games using a small barrel roaster. Clark was initially only trying to sell enough just to buy a ticket into the game and get a few beers.

"He was one of those baseball nerds who would wear the headphones, sit by himself, eat peanuts, drink beer and not talk to anyone," Tami said. "He would basically shut down at the beginning of the second inning and had enough money to buy some beers and watch the game."

Soon after, Clark met Tami in Seattle through some mutual friends. Her first impression was eye-opening.

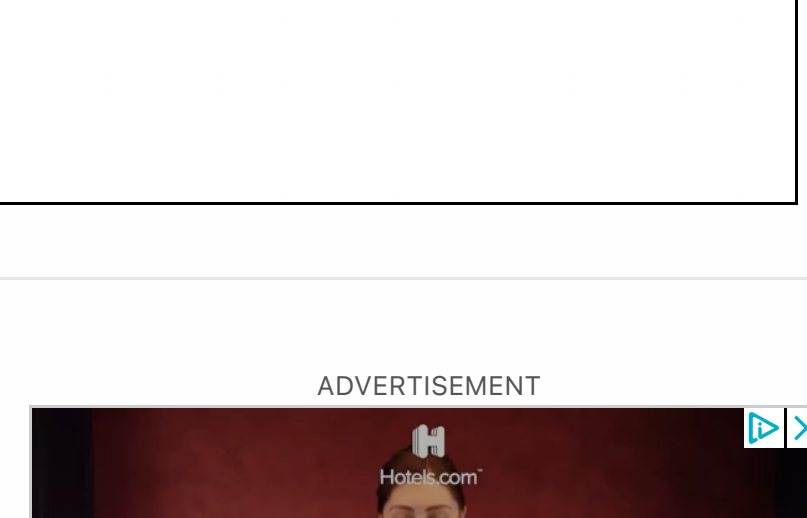
"I thought he was crazy," she said. "On our first date, he brought peanuts and was like, 'Check these out. Aren't they crazy?' And I was like, 'What are you a carry or something?'"

She ended up marrying that "crazy" person in 2004. Clark not only found the love of his life but also a companion to help him achieve his vision for a tree nut business.

Business is boomin'

To start, Tami began helping Clark sell peanuts at the ballpark before games under the name CB's Nuts, named after Clark's initials. Shortly after Queen (Lumen) Field was built, they were looking for some vendors to sell products for their suites and ended up making a deal with them. They soon started working with places like Poulsbo's Central Market, along with local grocery chains.

As production and distribution began to ramp up, an ideal venue opened near Kingston. It was the old fire station along Highway 104. Shortly after settling into their new shop, the Bowens saw a huge opportunity to pitch their product to Whole Foods and got picked up by them in the Pacific Northwest region. The products did so well that Whole Foods picked them up nationally in 2012. "That was one of our first big breaks," Tami said.



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They also had a roaster at Mariner games before COVID-19 but are not going to continue that as Tami said it was too difficult to manage from afar and ultimately not worth it due to low attendance.

Last year, CB's sold 1.1 units of nuts and nut butter, which equated to 1.3 million pounds. During the pandemic from May 2020 to July 2021, they provided 484,000 pounds of peanut butter for the state Department of Agriculture to food bank warehouses that were then distributed statewide.

"It's mind-boggling. Who would have thought? We've gone through so many different periods of economic change," Tami said. "Peanut butter is one of those things that stays constant in people's lives. It's nice not to be trendy. We're so fortunate with the partnerships of our store groups."

Facilities & Process

CB's Nuts' retail shop and tasting room feature all their products, merchandise and fresh baked goods. It is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. There is also an antique roaster from the original Adams Peanut Butter facility, which used to be in Tacoma.

"We've been able to refurbish these old antique roasters from the '20s and '30s, Tami said. "During the pandemic, we bought and refurbished a new roaster that has quadrupled our batch size."

For baseball fanatics like Clark, be sure to check out and sit in a section of the Mariner's dugout bench from the Kingdom, which he bought and refurbished to put in the store. "You can sit the pine where A-Rod sat; a bunch of really big players sat on that seat," Tami said.

Just down the road is the wholesale processing facility, which is closed to the public. There are about 20 employees there and five at the retail shop.

While the process of making nuts and nut butter may seem complicated, Tami said, "It's really simple." For in-shell peanuts, infuse sea salt and water directly through the shell. After drying, they're ready to roast. As the antique roasters turn, a roastermaster carefully monitors each small batch to create the perfect peanut, according to CB's website.

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"In-shell peanuts are the most complicated because we do this brining process," Tami said. "We spent two years trying to figure out how to get salt inside the peanut shells. It's a proprietary process that we ended up doing. It's based on old ways of doing it. Lots of companies have sort of moved away from traditional ways to do something that's more efficient."

For peanut butter, they grind them to a perfect "creamunchy" texture using no added sugars, preservatives or palm oil. "Together they create a unique rich roasted taste and almost smooth texture that allows for less oil separation in the jar," the website states. Organic, natural and salted versions are offered.

"Our efficiencies have come a long way. Everything used to be manual," Tami said, adding Clark is still very hands-on in the production process. "He's one of the big troubleshooters when things start to go haywire. I primarily do the business side, sales and marketing."

Tami describes their nuts as healthy, vegan and a really good high-protein snack. She said many laborers come to the shop every day to buy two or three pounds of peanuts. "They're working all day; they don't have time to take a break."

Looking ahead

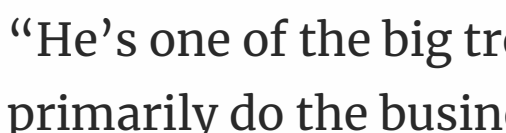
Although they are co-owners, technically Clark is the founder and Tami president of CB's Nuts. They have two teenagers.

"We never thought it was going to turn into this," Tami said. "We've managed to raise children while we're building a business. We work closely together, but try not to step on each other's toes."

The company takes pride in being Kitsap-based. Tami said they've seen kids come through the business and develop skills for their own careers. They also hire people with criminal records, and those transitioning through recovery.

Clark and Tami are both 50, but she said retirement isn't at the forefront of their minds.

"He's pretty content to do what he's doing," she said. "Obviously, Clark is the idea behind it but we have an excellent team. Some have been with us for eight to ten years. We have had so much support from so many people. I don't see us moving away from it very soon."



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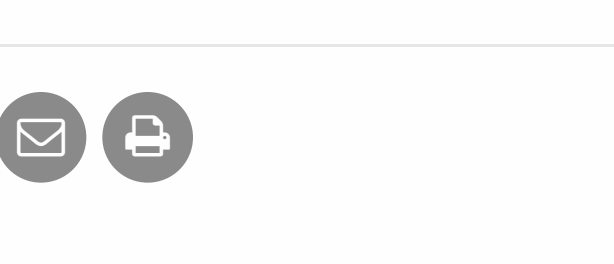
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