

Industry Spotlight - Don Julio Foods

Don Julio Foods Inc.

By Meik Rapp Associate Editor

Dreams do come true! At least that is true for Craig Fisher, President of Don Julio Foods Inc. Many years ago while serving a mission for the L.D.S. Church among the Navajo Indians in Arizona Craig learned to love spicy foods. After returning home in 1971, he made up his mind that one day he wanted to be in the manufacturing business. He wanted to stay with his roots in the food industry, and thus began his career.

Craig started working in the grocery business like many others as a bagger, stocker and checker at the old Winegars Supermarket in Sunset, Utah, in 1966 while attending high school. He learned much of the business from Stuart Winegar, Phil Barber and Lairy Wood. "Those were great men to be associated with. They taught me a lot about the grocery business and perhaps a great deal more about how to live," Craig said.

After returning home and marrying the girl of his dreams, he went to work as a route salesman for Little Pancho Mexican Food Company in the Northern Utah area. Craig's route covered Kaysville on the South to Preston, Idaho on the North. "This was an amazing growing experience for me. I learned that every possible sale was important and how important quality is to grow sales!" Craig said. At this juncture, Craig also developed lasting associations that have helped him throughout his career. "I had a chance to spend time with great grocers then and now, and they have been very kind to me," he stated. Craig worked as a route salesman for two years, then was promoted to District Sales Manager shortly thereafter. Within a few years Craig became the Division Manager over

Little Pancho, a division of Clover Club Snack Food Company, with responsibilities including the production facility as well as all sales for the company. Soon, he was promoted to Regional Sales Manager, with responsibilities of the Clover Club Snack Food Company sales in the Intermountain area as well as maintaining his responsibilities with Little Pancho. It was then that Craig said he dreamed of really owning a flour tortilla manufacturing company. When Bordens purchased Clover Club in 1984, Craig elected to leave the company and begin a brokerage business. Craig Fisher and Company Food Brokers was born, and yes—Mexican Food was at the center of his list of principals.

In 1994 Craig continued working on his dream of a manufacturing facility and began Don Julio Foods Company. He arranged to have tortilla chips packed for him, as well as fresh flour and corn tortillas and a gourmet line of fine salsa under the Don Julio name. So where did Craig come up with the name "Don Julio"? It was his way of saying thanks to his wife Julia for her continuing support and love while he tried to accomplish his dream.

With a little twist from an "A" to an "O" in Julio and adding Don (which means mister in



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Spanish) Craig trademarked the name and logo—which really means "Mr. My Wife".

Craig joined with some partners in 1997 and created "Nach-O-Fast" and soon thereafter there were franchise stores in the United States, Philippines, Venezuela and the United Arab Emirates. "Franchising was a fun experience and it was exciting to see something grow from nothing into an International experience," Craig said. After buying out his Nach-O-Fast partners in 1999, Craig purchased the "Corn Dog Factory" stores and began co-branding the concepts in malls. He decided to sell the franchise company to an associate to clear the way for him to focus on Don Julio Foods. Craig also sold his Food Brokerage business to his long time friend and associate Robert Egan. At the time of the sale, his brokerage business had become the largest Gourmet/Specialty Food Brokerage in the Intermountain area.

Craig decided to return to college and work on completing his Bachelors Degree in business at the University

of Phoenix, Ogden campus. "This proved to be one of the greatest decisions of my life," Craig said. "While completing my final class, our study group made a semester project of drawing out the requirements and proformas for a flour tortilla facility," Craig said. Soon a location for the production facility was discovered at the Freeport Center in Clearfield. The plant was funded and began operation in January of 2002. Don Julio Foods now operates in Building Z-13 with two presslines running almost two shifts.

Once the facility was in full operation, it was decided that there was a need to have a distributor take fresh tortillas to the grocery stores in the Intermountain area. Wonder Bread accepted the new line of "Fresh" Southwest Style Don Julio Tortillas and is currently taking them fresh daily to the grocery stores in the greater Utah area. "This is a huge opportunity for us to be associated with such great people as the Interstate Brands personnel. We are hopeful that grocers will recognize the quality of the product and

the distributor as they consider this new attempt to bring hot tortillas to the marketplace," Craig said.

Craig's son Nate is the Vice President of Don Julio Foods and after graduating from Weber State University has really helped move the company forward. "Nate has developed associations in the industry that have helped our sales immensely," Craig said. Rodon Foods is the broker representing Don Julio products in the market. "Rodon brings a wealth of knowledge and relationships to the company. They are doing an excellent job in aiding us with our growth plans," Craig said.

Don Julio Foods has plans for growing their retail and institutional business in the Intermountain area and continuing on a steady growth plan. Yes, it all started as a dream and Craig credits family and friends for allowing him and assisting him along the way to accomplish his aspirations.