

Sustainable Joe

At Strictly Organic they practice—and pour—what they preach

Strictly Organic had its beginning roasting green beans into flavorful coffees.

WHEN YOU WALK INTO STRICTLY ORGANIC, the captivating aromas of roasting coffee beans and pastries are your first sensory experience. Next comes the sight of vaulted ceilings, natural blond woods and a wall-sized menu full of organic fare.

Located in the Old Mill Marketplace on the corner of Arizona and Bond, Strictly Organic Coffee Company epitomizes the sustainable ethic from roasting to delivery. It is Bend's only coffee roaster with beans that are both 100 percent Certified Organic and Fair Trade Certified. The company buys renewable energy, pays 100 percent of full-time employee's health insurance, and provides for door-to-door deliveries via the Pelican, a bicycle with a big scoop on the front.

"I think people really like and appreciate that we are locally owned, Fair Trade Certified and Certified Organic," said Colin Mahood, a Strictly Organic bean-roaster who also races

for the XC Oregon/Rossignol Nordic ski team.

The coffee is roasted at a nearby warehouse and in a new on-site roaster that was built by Richard Steffensen, who co-owns the company with his wife, Rhonda Ealy. It's not unusual for Strictly Organic to roast several hundred pounds of coffee beans a night—more over the holidays when gift boxes fly out the door. With about twenty employees, the company does from one to two million dollars in annual sales. Business has doubled in the past two years, with sales balanced between wholesale customers and its retail site that sells beans, coffee drinks and organic food. Fresh-made entrees can be tailored to fit customer's dietary needs, from vegetarians to vegans to those on non-dairy diets. This year, the menu includes an expanded selection of gluten-free items.

In the early 1990s, Steffensen, a Springfield, Oregon



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Steve Tague (2)

Richard Steffensen (left) checks on a batch of roasting beans with Strictly Organic roaster Colin Mahood.

native, started Sunriver Coffee with his sister. But after a half-dozen years of business, his sister moved to Corvallis where she started Pacifica Coffee. Steffensen and Ealy had to decide whether to buy the business or start over.

“For a coffee roaster, there weren’t that many options: We knew coffee farmers were very poor, while distributors, processors and retailers were making real money,” said Ealy. “We were selling conventional coffee, but understood the inequity for the farmers. Despite specialty coffee being a six billion dollar industry [it is now over \$12 billion] in the U.S., only a small amount went back to the bean-growing countries. And a fraction of that went to the farmers struggling to put beans and rice on their tables.”

Steffensen and Ealy decided to move on from Sunriver Coffee and plot their next move. In 1999, they stuck with what they knew best but, under the banner of Strictly Organic, began buying and roasting fair trade organic beans to sell to local restaurants. The new company’s distribution grew to include stores such as Newport Market, Ray’s Food Place and Nature’s, and restaurants like Alpenglow, Big O Bagel and even the chic Blacksmith. The Bend Fire Department stocks Strictly Organic at all its stations and partners with the company on projects benefiting Bend’s sister city, Condega, Nicaragua. Strictly Organic has a direct trade relationship with Nueva Esperanza, a coffee growing cooperative comprised of bean-growing families in the Canto Gallo region of Nicaragua.


In 2006, Strictly Organic segued into retail with a café in the Old Mill Marketplace. Ealy said that the retail arm of the business grew from the demand of customers on the wholesale side, particularly from restaurant customers who then bought the coffee in grocery stores and finally wanted home delivery.

Despite its upscale location, about half of the shop’s sales are for the old standby

drip coffee. “We get the black-coffee-in-a-cup crowd,” said Ealy. “They might want a little syrup, but they don’t want caramel or chocolate drizzled over everything.”

The owners believe their mission is not only to provide coffee through a sustainable business model, but to be a good neighbor, too. Strictly Organic is open every day of the year. “Not everyone has a place to go on the holidays, or even celebrates the same holidays,” said Ealy. “We have people who come in every day. If they don’t show up, someone in the group goes and checks on them!”

The goal for Ealy and Steffensen is to stay true to their philosophy of a sustainable cup. “When someone comes in, we want to give them good customer service and make them feel welcome and happy, with an environmentally sustainable product,” said Steffensen. “There are a lot of great people in town who are customers who share our philosophy.”

Larry Brumwell, owner of neighboring InClimb climbing gym, is someone who appreciates Strictly Organic’s environmental and sustainable ethic. “The staff is amazing,” he said. “They call you by name, and there’s none of that classic bistro-burnout.” 

INFO Strictly Organic Coffee
541.383.1570
www.strictlyorganic.com



Rhonda Ealy, along with her husband and business partner Richard Steffensen, started Strictly Organic in 1999.