



Off-Season Grind

by Terry Matthews-Lombardo

Even here in Florida, where you can likely find a baseball game being played somewhere 365 days a year, professional players relish the winter as a chance to rest and rejuvenate before another long season ahead. But one local pro is making the best of his off-field, off-season opportunities.

John Gast, a 2007 Lake Brantley High School grad and current pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals, likes to tinker in his off-season. He also likes to drink coffee and plan for a future beyond baseball, all of which led him to invent a state-of-the-art coffee truck – one that serves something that is a rarity in the world of food trucks: a delicious, gourmet cup of fresh-roasted coffee. John, a marketing major at Florida State University, calls it Craft Roasters, and since returning home to Altamonte at the end of the 2014 season, he's been busy building his business from the ground up. In just a few short months, Craft Roasters has made appearances at more than 35 special events around Central Florida, including a crazy-busy night at the LBHS Homecoming, and a weekly Sunday gig at the Sweetwater-Wekiva Farmers Market.

"I wanted to expose people to what coffee can be – to not take it for granted and drink it just for the caffeine jolt," John says. "I get such pleasure by experimenting with different flavors while roasting my own beans, which I buy completely fresh, still green."

John slow-roasts the beans at home in a process involving a specially crafted rotating roaster that is heated by propane gas. Those aromatically roasted beans are then brought onto the truck and ground per cup as orders come in over the counter.

"We carefully measure the beans, then grind. Using the 'pour-over' method, we wait for a three-minute infusion before serving," John explains. It's the secret to a successful brew and sensual coffee experience that customers enjoy as much for the taste as the earthy, fresh-ground essence.

And for those who need a touch of sweetness with their cup-o'-joe, John's mother, Sharon, has been perfecting her baking skills and adding some awesome baked goodies to the Craft Roasters menu. In fact, the entire project can be called a family affair, with everyone in the Gast clan helping out as needed.

Come baseball season, the truck will be put in storage while its owner returns to his first love: grinding out wicked-fast pitches from the Cardinals' mound. But watch for the truck's return to the area next winter.

Local Major League Baseball pitcher spends his winter building an innovative coffee business

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