

[Up & Comer]

JUST COFFEE

FOUNDED: 2002

PARTNERS: Matt Earley (left), Ben Hung (right), Mike Moon, Mike Miller, Rob McClure

SLOGAN: Not Just a Market. But a Movement.

FOR MORE INFO:
www.justcoffee.net

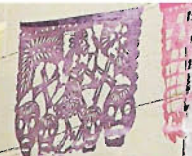


PHOTO BY MARTHA BUSSE
DASH THE MAN
SHOP MUFFLIN

Not Just Coffee

It's called Just Coffee, but Madison's new fair trade café is connecting people with more than caffeine By Kathryn Kingsbury

HOW MANY BUSINESS OWNERS WOULD CONFESS THEY'D like to pay their suppliers more money? That's right — more.

"We're pushing politics into business," says Matt Earley, co-founder of Just Coffee with Ben Hung and local farmer Mike Moon. The Madison coffee roaster deals only in organic beans that have

been bought on the fair-trade market, meaning that farmers get a guaranteed "living wage" price of at least \$1.41 per pound of coffee — two to six times what they may get on the commodities market that accounts for the bulk of coffee sold in the United States.

Just Coffee roasted and sold its first batch in September 2002. In its first full year of business, it grossed \$100,000. In 2004, sales more than doubled. This year, projected net income is in the range of \$400,000 to \$500,000. Just Coffee now sells more than three dozen different roasts and blends through outlets in twenty states. Not bad work for a handful of Madison lefties more interested in politics than profits.

Indeed, the creation of Just Coffee was a fortuitous side effect of Earley and Moon's Latin American solidarity work. They met some

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folks from a Zapatista community in Mexico who wanted to form a coffee growers' cooperative to generate money for improvements to community health care, infrastructure and schools. Unable to find a buyer for the co-op's beans, Earley and Moon decided in 2001 to take the next logical step: roast and sell the beans themselves. Hung joined on as a third partner and for a year they studied roasting techniques, learned about business operations, researched equipment and developed a business plan based on equitable partnerships with coffee farmers and involvement with the local community.

To that end, Just Coffee has developed more than a dozen "fundraiser" specialty roasts for local school and community groups. Purchase a pound of Marsh Grounds and \$3.50 goes to the Wisconsin Wetlands Association; sip some Broadcast Blend to send \$1 per pound to community radio station WORT-FM.

But community involvement is about more than money, say Just Coffee's owners. They're fostering a pen-pal program between Madison elementary-school students and children from a coffee-growing community in Guatemala, and they dream of bringing the children together to meet face to face. "We're not just hawking their product, but connecting their people with these people [in Madison]," says Mike Miller, who became a co-owner in 2004. WORT-FM weather guru Rob McClure will soon be the newest of the five owners.

And that Mexican farmer's co-op that got it all started? It now has 1,500 members and exports many tons annually to Europe and the United States.

Earley says that Just Coffee wants to model a different way of doing business – one in which the benefit to the community is at least as important as the benefit to the company. "Sometimes we have to catch ourselves and remind ourselves that if we're not selling coffee, we're not going to be able to support the rest of it," he chuckles.

Kathryn Kingsbury is a contributing writer to *Madison Magazine*.



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