

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS IN LOUDON: Affirm Water

By Lee Laughlin



Affirm Water bottles customized for New Hampshire businesses.



Co-owners Tina White, left, and Alicia Grimaldi at work.

Taking Care of Business In Loudon is a monthly feature spotlighting a Loudon business researched and written on a volunteer basis by Lee Laughlin. At this time, we have profiles lined up through November of this year. However, if you would like to add your business to be profiled, please contact her at laughlin@fearlessevents.com or 783-8971.

Have you ever had the “good fortune” to sit in on a brainstorming session to create a corporate mission? Almost sounds like something out of Dilbert cartoon right? Well, what if a company created a mission that was written in plain English and then really used it to guide the development of the business? Such is the case with Affirm Water, a Loudon-based company that distributes food-quality stainless steel water bottles emblazoned with life affirming messages or your company’s logo.

The corporate mission is this: “Affirm Water is committed to getting you to drink more water from a safe vessel while protecting the environment and creating positive change in the world.” Straightforward, yet at the same time lofty, no?

This kind of ying and yang is the hallmark of the relationship of the company’s owners, Alicia Grimaldi and Tina White. Alicia and Tina met at Clough Pond while their kids were taking swimming lessons. It what has turned into a typical pattern, Alicia shared her dream about safe drinking water and Tina said “We can do that.”

Neither of these women are what you would call “underachievers.”

Tina is an entrepreneur at heart. She has a successful business creating personalized candy wrappers for chocolate bars. She thrills in the challenge of learning to do something. She is gifted in all things computer and loves research.

Alicia’s background is in social work, but more recently she was certified as a Holistic Health Counselor by the Institute for Integrative Nutrition and has a thriving holistic healthcare practice in Concord.

After the pondside conversation, Tina launched a thorough research initiative to locate a low cost, high quality, safe vessel that could be personalized. She and Alicia reviewed numerous samples before selecting the bottles they sell today.

As demonstrated by the mission statement, both women are passionate about the environment and supporting local businesses. They were very disappointed when their search did not yield one suitable product manufactured in the U.S. The cost was too high and the quality did not meet their high standards. Ultimately they selected a bottle manufactured in China. This allowed them to provide a quality product at a price that would make it economically feasible for people looking to adapt green habits. Their first online sale was made in February 2007.

When concerns arose about products manufactured in China being tainted with lead, Tina and Alicia immediately contacted their manufacturer and were assured that their product was safe. That was nice to hear, but again going back to the mission statement, they wanted to be 100% sure they were selling a safe product, so they contracted with an independent third party to test the bottles. The initial tests came back negative for lead or other contaminants, but to maintain quality control, Affirm Water has its bottles tested on a regular basis.

The business is run out of both of their homes with Tina handling most of the printing and Alicia running the fulfillment process. During crunch times, they keep it local and employ other Loudon moms to lend a hand.

Most companies are focused on branding and insuring that their logo is in front of the customer at every point in the sales process. While no less concerned with insuring future business, Affirm Water focuses first on their mission (protecting the environment) and bucks the trend when it comes to shipping boxes. They use recycled materials from Granite State Health Foods in Concord. On a side note, if you or your company has a bunch of boxes or bubble wrap that you would like to see

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recycled please contact Tina or Alicia. They'd be happy to help!

Being guided by a well-intentioned mission is all great, but does it put food on the table? The answer is a resounding YES! Business is booming. The bottles are very popular and have been sold to residents of 35 states and 7 Canadian Provinces. When they started, most retail outlets weren't interested until Affirm Water allowed them to take the bottles on consignment. The bottles would sell out in days and now, stores around the state carry Affirm Water bottles (a complete list of retail outlets is available on their web site www.affirmwater.com). In keeping with their mission, they donated 5% of last year's gross profits to the Nature Conservancy, a group known for their efforts to protect and promote safe drinking water.

In the first three months of this year they have already exceeded last year's total sales. They can't keep the bottles in stock. While individual orders are their bread and butter, they are receiving more and more large custom orders. When the city Governments of Chicago, Illinois and Olympia, Washington placed larger orders for green office initiatives for their employees, Tina started researching other companies who could more easily handle large quantity print runs. She was thrilled that the most suitable business was also the most local (just over the border in Massachusetts) and another small business to boot.

The original Affirm Water bottle.



New designs: "Inspire," "Love," and "Peace."



Being community minded is also part of their mind set. Booth are very active in community activities including supporting the Loudon Elementary School Environmental Club and working with local groups in a way that benefits everyone. For example, the sophomore class at Merrimack Valley High School recently held a successful fundraising drive with Affirm Water bottles to raise money for class activities.

So, what is on the horizon for Affirm Water? They are expanding their marketing and outreach activities

including, updating their web site to include more information about safe and healthy drinking water and exhibiting at the Going Green Expo at the Raddisson Manchester this November. They are also looking to expand their product line with more designs and water related products. One product that is showing potential is a water bottle holder made out of recycled plastic shopping bags. You can be sure whatever Tina and Alicia decide to do next, it will be with their mission statement in mind.

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To learn more about safe drinking water or to purchase your own Affirm Water bottle, visit their web site at <http://www.affirmwater.com>. ■

Lee Laughlin is an event planner and writer who lives in Loudon. She blogs at <http://independentbw.blogspot.com/>

Keep Wildlife Wild — Leave Young Animals Alone

If you encounter wildlife, even young animals that appear to need help, the kindest (and safest) thing to do is to leave them alone and let nature take its course, officials from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department said today.

This time of year, many people call Fish and Game reporting that they have



picked up young animals, thinking they are orphans. "Picking up fawns, baby raccoons or young animals is an error in judgment," says Fish and Game Lt. Bruce Bonenfant. "People think they're doing a good deed, but they are often removing the animal from the care of its parents and exposing themselves to the risk of disease. What's more, these actions may result in the animal having to be euthanized for rabies testing."

Young wild animals (including mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) have their best chance of surviving when they are in their own natural environment, says Fish and Game Wildlife Programs Administrator Mark Ellingwood. What should you do if you find a young animal? "Give wildlife plenty of space and leave them alone and in the wild, where they belong," he said.

Seeing a fawn alone, for example, does NOT mean that it is orphaned or that it needs our help. Ellingwood explains that it is normal for a doe to leave her fawn alone while she goes off to feed in the early morning and evening hours. In many cases, the doe will not return until nightfall. "Fawns are not defenseless creatures. Their cryptic coloration, tendency to stay perfectly still and lack of scent, are all adaptations that help them survive," he

said. Does are easy to detect because of their size and scent, so they generally keep a distance from their fawns, except during brief nursing bouts, so that predators don't key in on them. "This hands-off policy also applies to bear cubs and moose calves," Ellingwood said.

"So, if you're lucky enough to see a deer fawn, bear cub, moose calf or other wild animal, count your blessings and leave the area," Ellingwood advises. "Unless you can verify that an animal's mother is dead, please leave it alone. The majority of a doe's time, as an example, is spent away from the fawn. Persistent revisiting by sympathetic people only serves to prolong the separation and delay important feeding.

If you have questions, call your local Fish and Game office."

Only qualified people with special rehabilitator's permits, issued through Fish and Game in Concord, may take in and care for injured or orphaned wildlife. Unless you have these credentials, it is illegal to have in your possession or take any New Hampshire wildlife from the wild and keep it in captivity. For a list of licensed wildlife rehabilitators, go to www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/wildlife_rehabbers.htm.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department is the guardian of the state's fish, wildlife and marine resources and their habitats. Visit www.wildnh.com. ■

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