

Emerging Businesses: From Colombia to Madison, Café Social knows coffee



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Omar Lopez knows good coffee when he tastes it and when his family grows it.

"I am from the coffee region of the Andes Mountains in Colombia known as 'El Eje Cafetero,' or the coffee core. This is where the finest Colombian coffee is produced," Lopez says.

Lopez is co-owner of Café Social, a coffee distribution business with offices in Madison and Colombia.

Lopez has lived in Madison for 14 years and worked as a real estate agent and a tax preparer, mostly working with the Latino community.

In Colombia, he was a civil engineer. After he finished his MBA at Edgewood College in Madison, he went back to Colombia. He spoke with his sister, Diana Lopez, who owns a coffee farm and roaster in Armenia, Quindío, Colombia.

"I came back to Madison and knew that importing pure Colombian coffee from Diana's farm was the right choice. It is who I am," said Lopez.

His brother, Harby, is in charge of roasting and packaging the coffee and works with the Colombian Coffee Federation to certify the coffee before exporting.

"By roasting our coffee in Armenia, it supports and provides employment for my home community, which makes me feel good," said Lopez, whose duties include transportation and distribution.

The business name, Café Social, was determined after several choices were discarded. "Social means the same in English and Spanish, except that it's pronounced a little differently. Because coffee is something that people linger over, me and my family decided that Café Social was the right name," Lopez said.

The first shipment of gourmet coffee went out last April. The brand is in more than 25

supermarkets.

"We're in all of the Wisconsin and Illinois Woodman's, Metcalfe's (Market), Miller & Sons, Hometown supermarket in Spring Green, Capitol Centre Market, Bill's Market in Oregon, and Piggly Wiggly," said Doug Swenson, a co-owner of Café Social.

The coffee also is available in Colombia at supermarkets and coffee shops.

One staff member, Kathi Kemp, helps with sales.

Farmers' markets have helped Lopez and Swenson introduce their product to the public. They can be found at the Hilldale Shopping Center's indoor winter market.

On Sundays beginning May 5, they will be at the Monona farmers' market brewing and selling coffee, cappuccinos, lattes, mochas and iced coffee. Brewed tea is also available for customers who don't drink coffee.

"Sometimes I feel like Madison's Juan Valdez," Lopez said.

"Emerging Businesses" features family-owned businesses. To suggest a business, contact Jill Carlson at jillcarlson1957@gmail.com.

Café Social

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