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The gift of opportunity to Oklahoma food entrepreneurs

(Stillwater, Okla. – July 19, 2011) When the need arose to fund an opportunity for Oklahoma food entrepreneurs with the promotion and marketing of their products, David Howard, founder and chief innovator of Unitherm Food Systems of Bristow, Okla., stepped forward with a one-time gift of almost \$9,500.

“As an entrepreneur myself, I know how important it is to support others,” Howard said. “My gift is a small part in backing Oklahoma entrepreneurs with advancing their businesses.”

Unitherm’s monetary contribution, as well as additional support by the Made in Oklahoma program, helped create Oklahoma Gourmet, a newly formed group representing clients of Oklahoma State University’s Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center (FAPC), at The Gourmet Market in Dallas, Texas.

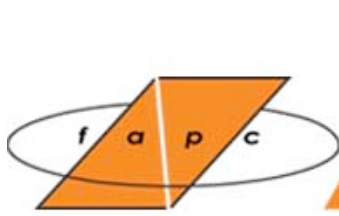
“Participating in The Dallas Gourmet Market is a huge step for an entrepreneurial company,” said Andrea Graves, FAPC business and marketing specialist and leader of implementation of the Oklahoma Gourmet project. “The FAPC is excited to assist clients in the process of creating brand recognition and increased revenue.”

The Gourmet Market hosts three large food shows a year inviting retailers to the Dallas Market Center. The Oklahoma Gourmet booth features three FAPC entrepreneurial clients in the space purchased with Howard’s gift.

“The funding provided by Mr. Howard helped the FAPC develop a new program to assist our entrepreneurial clients in spite of the current budgets cuts and enabled start-up companies to participate in The Gourmet Market at a reduced price,” Graves said.

The Gourmet Market is a 25,000-square-foot shared showroom with unique gourmet and specialty food lines as well as housewares, cookware, tabletop, kitchen gadgets and wine accessories from more than 150 companies representing some of the biggest names in the industry as well as up-and-coming individual entrepreneurs.

The Gourmet Market is just one of the many categories of the Dallas Market Center, which is known as the world’s most complete wholesale marketplace. The Dallas Market Center holds 50-plus markets each year attended by more than 200,000 buyers from across the globe.



Launching a food product into the vast, diverse and competitive market is not the easiest thing to do, Howard said. Any opportunity to create an avenue to get the product in front of buyers is beneficial.

“The FAPC Industry Advisory Committee wants to see more companies enter the market,” Howard said. “FAPC director, Roy Escoubas, spotted an opportunity at the Dallas Gourmet Market to assist Oklahomans with generating a job growing opportunity.”

As a member of the FAPC Industry Advisory Committee, Howard saw value in displaying Oklahoma food products at the Dallas Market Center.

“Over the last 4 years, on several occasions, the FAPC Industry Advisory Committee has asked how well the center is doing at preparing entrepreneurs and graduates from the FAPC entrepreneur program,” Howard said. “Oklahoma Gourmet is another venture to help secure serious contracts and grow business in Oklahoma.”

Howard is known as an industry leader with an innovative mindset in the creation and design of machines and systems. He believes safety, efficiency and innovation has allowed Unitherm to be competitive in developing food processes.

Howard founded Unitherm in the United Kingdom in 1985, but relocated the business to the United States in 1995.

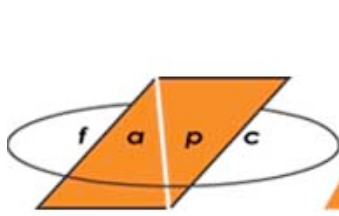
“Unitherm does tradeshows domestically and internationally,” Howard said. “Unless we execute and get in front of the customer, the client is simply looking at drawings, not at the product, or in Unitherm’s case, a piece of equipment.”

Since the company’s inception more than 25 years ago, Unitherm has introduced the smoking process for 80 percent of all smoked turkey sold, launched numerous ready meal processes, and cooked everything from pasta to chicken and jerky to peppers.

“It is important to make a product with character that competes well,” Howard said. “Hopefully, there are customers to purchase the product. A business can only be successful if you can sell your products.”

Howard said providing opportunities such as display space at The Gourmet Market helps young companies with exposure of their products.

“I encourage every manufacturing company to look for other markets for their products,” Howard said. “Programs like Oklahoma Gourmet can be used to generate more opportunity.”



Factors of difficult economic times and increased market share of large companies often halt the growth of small businesses.

“It is very difficult to get customers attention,” Howard said. “This venture is creating a vehicle to put the product in front of the customer.”

Oklahoma Gourmet featured clients for 2011 include the Twisted Chile of Tulsa, Okla.; Ziegelmeier Toasted Pecan Butter of Ada, Okla.; and Suan’s Scotch Bonnet Pepper Jelly of Oklahoma City, Okla.

Graves said these companies retail their products throughout Oklahoma, but the goal is to get these clients to the next level of marketing, selling and distributing.

“The Gourmet Market has been a success for all clients,” Graves said. “Not only have they have found a new venue, but they also have made new contacts and increased sales in this early stage.”

As a result of her exposure at The Gourmet Market, Suan’s Foods won the coveted Gourmet Gold Award for her scotch bonnet pepper jelly, which helped lead to national recognition as Editor’s Choice in the Fancy Food magazine.

“This is just one example of a ripple effect for these start-up companies,” Graves said. “Oklahoma Gourmet is a stepping stone for Oklahoma food entrepreneurs to take that leap into becoming more than just a small business.”

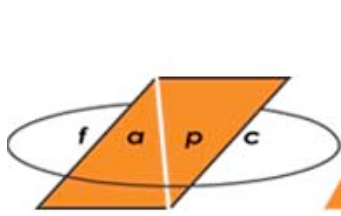
Howard said the success of the clients would determine if Oklahoma Gourmet is permanent. He hopes the purchased booth space continues in upcoming years.

“Success in the Dallas Gourmet Market is good for the entrepreneurs and also good for Oklahoma,” Howard said.

Howard encourages companies not linked with the FAPC and needs help to contact the center to discover how they can help to grow their business.

“The FAPC is a unique opportunity for both existing and new food companies to get expertise across all aspects of operating business,” Howard said. “I would like to encourage all companies that are involved in the food industry to get to know the scope and capability of the center.”

For more information about Oklahoma Gourmet or the FAPC, visit www.fapc.biz, or contact the center at 405-744-6071 or e-mailing fapc@okstate.edu.



Robert M. Kerr
Food & Agricultural Products Center

NEWS RELEASE

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