



Company sells flavored salt and excels at giving back

The label on each container of Sea Salts of Hawaii tells the buyer a story about the main ingredient's relationship to the islands.

"It gives them something to connect to," said owner Sandra Gibson. "And some of the little stories ... add a little character to the prod-

uct." If purchased as a gift, for instance, the giver will have a true tale to tell the recipient.

"When we started off, we kind of assumed people would buy it as gifts, or, as souvenirs, for travelers," but Gibson's customer base is a mix of local residents and visitors, many of whom buy

the salts to use in their cooking, as well as for gifts.

Its classic flavors include the expected plain Hawaiian salt and red-hued alaea salt, but also local favorite flavors including Maui onion, Uahi, or black coconut charcoal, and ohe, or jade green bamboo-flavored salt.

The salts have numerous applications, not just for fancy cooking, but for simple treats, such as, to flavor popcorn, for bamboo-scented rice, or in cocktail-making, such as using the Maui onion-flavored salt to rim a glass for a bloody mary, Gibson said.

A cracker, some brie and some Maui onion salt is an easy way of adding a little extra flavor to a simple dish, she said.

Newer, more unique flavors from the company include Nalo Farms Fresh Herb salt. The herb blend is created by farmer Dean Okimoto.

"I use the Nalo Farm Salt just about every day," she said. Okimoto's herbs "are just off-the-charts delicious."

Other flavors include fresh Hawaiian ginger salt; sweet Hawaiian pineapple salt; hot Hawaiian chili pepper salt; spicy Hawaiian seaweed; and Molokai kiawe-smoked salt.

A taste of that last flavor can bring a thick, juicy steak to mind. Then again, so can the chili pepper salt, which also is enhanced with garlic.

The chili pepper, smoked and white Kona salt are on board the Hokule'a sailing canoe as a gift to the crew for their historic voyage, "and then I thought, 'Why don't we do a contribution for each of the classic-flavored bottles (of salt)?" Gibson said.

So, \$1 of the purchase price for those bottles purchased during World Oceans Month and at the Made in Hawaii Festival was donated to the Polynesian Voyaging Society. Gibson also was selling the society's sailcloth tote bags at

the festival, to help them with fundraising.

On an ongoing basis, Sea Salts of Hawaii parent company, Hawaiian Islands Trading Co., donates 1 percent of sales proceeds to the Papa-haunamokuakea Marine National Monument.

"We wanted to stay within Hawaii's values of when you take something, to give back," she said. "We thought since we are taking from the ocean, we would like to give back to the ocean."

She has arranged with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to have 100 percent of her contributions to go toward marine debris cleanup and maintenance of Hawaiian cultural sites.

With such corporate giving established, it may seem as if Gibson has been in business a very long time, but the company was established only in 2012.

Since then, Sea Salts of Hawaii products have become available at some 69 retailers around the islands, including 28 on Oahu; 22 on Maui; seven on Hawaii island; nine on Kauai; and three on Lanai. All are listed on the company website, while the listing herein is a mere sampling.

Bottles of her Kona Sea Salt were included among

other Hawaii products contained in koa bowls given to 100 congressional spouses by first lady Michelle Obama, Gibson said.

The Made in Hawaii Festival two years ago "was really our first step to market," Gibson said, and she got in only because another exhibitor canceled.

"We scrambled to get signage and some collateral (materials) ready," she said.

Retail buyers and consumers expressed interest in her product line and helped set Sea Salts of Hawaii on the path to growth and success.

At first, "we were packaging the salt ourselves," renting time at the Pacific Gateway Center Culinary Kitchen Incubator, which she called "a wonderful program, and it really helped us those first few months ... we were so grateful to have that opportunity."

Her salts are now prepared and packaged by Lanakila Pacific, which helps fund its nonprofit programs including Meals on Wheels "and in its own little way, benefits people who have challenges in their lives," Gibson said.

"We're happy to have a partnership that works out for everybody."



COURTESY SEA SALTS OF HAWAII

WHERE TO BUY

Hawaiian Islands Trading Co. LLC
333-8211
www.seasaltsofhawaii.com

OAHU

Farmers markets (KCC, Kailua), Iolani Palace, Whole Foods Market

MAUI

Andaz Maui at Wailea, Hawaii National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Sand People

HAWAII ISLAND

Four Seasons Resort Hualalai, Kona Mountain Coffee, Parker Ranch Store

KAUAI

Living Foods Market & Cafe, Moon-Bow Magic Gift Gallery, St. Regis Princeville Hotel (Accents)

LANAI

The Local Gentry

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