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ONWARD WITH
PETER J. WARD

A REEL LIFE SUCCESS STORY

In the 1987 hit film *Baby Boom*, Diane Keaton suddenly finds herself navigating romance, a high-powered career and parenthood, then starting off on her own and launching a baby food line. For two West Orange, NJ dads, their story is the modern day twist on the movie classic.

David Fullner-Auld, a vice president of ViacomCBS Network Post Production Operations, and his husband and business partner Daniel Fullner-Auld, a former director of Learning Technologies & Academic Support at John Jay College in New York, have launched Kekoa Foods, a new organic baby food in 3 different recipes.

Launching a baby food company during a pandemic might not seem like a great idea, but this team had a secret weapon: their son, Paul Kekoa. In fact, the co-founders of Kekoa Foods (Kekoa is Hawaiian for “brave warrior”) are hoping to tap into a large chunk of an industry that according to Statista, has grown steadily from \$71.8 billion in 2018 to projected sales \$98.9 billion over the next three years.

Kekoa Foods launched on Amazon and is currently available in North America. They hope to reach further into more overseas markets in the coming months. “Over the next few quarters of growth, we hope to expand our market quickly overseas and make it easier to get our products on their shelves,” says Daniel. “We are looking at long term plans to include the world market in places like the Philippines and Indonesia.”

After their son Paul’s birth in Honolulu, Hawaii, the Fullner-Aulds decided they were going to commit to giving their son the best organic food they could possibly find. And after doing some research and finding themselves dissatisfied with what was available on the market, they decided to start making their own food for him.

David tried different combinations of ingredients not usually found in baby food, like fennel, kale, curry, beets and other healthy vegetables and fruits. He prepared food using spices, organic vegetables, and fruits to make the food more appealing while remaining healthy and nutritious. “If he didn’t eat it, it was move on and start over” says David. The more Paul ate, the more they knew they were onto something.







Paul Kekoa enjoying fennel, a featured ingredient in Beets, Fennel & Kale.

David took his recipes to social media, which helped spark the genesis of the company after reactions to the meals and their preparation. "I started to post the meals I was making online and friends would tell us that Paul was eating better than they were, says David. "And if we made the foods available, they would try and duplicate the recipe for their children and the next thing you know, I told Daniel I wanted to start a baby food line."

Introducing **KEKOA FOODS**



“They offer a must-have product to families at a time when we need it most,” said Glamis Haro, a Senior Business Advisor at Columbia University Small Business Development Center, who helped the pair move their business from the kitchen to the assembly line.

Haro said she was sold the minute she tested the product. “As a mother I can tell you, no other baby food compares. And with everything going on with us, worrying about what’s in our baby’s food, this is a no-brainer, it tastes great and it’s healthy”.

While David worked on recipes and flavors, Daniel left his job to get the company off the ground and be home more with their son. Then Covid hit, but they found a way to solve a problem while they were stifled. Kekoa Foods production was shut down, and the two men decided to take advantage of the break and move production operations to the west coast in order to get

their food supplies ready for production. This turned out to be a key move. “They were making all the right moves. It’s the only thing that slowed them down,” said Haro.

“We had great partners who helped us with our footing and now we are up and running and selling on Amazon,” says Daniel. Plans for the next steps include hospitals and gaining certification to become a featured product in school cafeterias. “It’s brilliant, it’s the most logical step and the hospitals and the schools will love it,” says Haro.

The supply chain issue is still impacting every industry, including Kekoa Foods, but they use the ingredients that are available to keep their production moving. “With any new business, you’re going to come across a lot of issues, but you have to overcome [them]. Thankfully we have a great team behind us and there is no telling how far we can all go,” says David. “One thing is for certain, we won’t stop looking at ways to grow and expand, but first, baby steps.” ■