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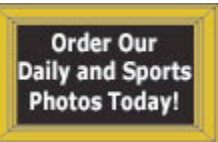
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Vermont soapmaker goes to the goats

May 11, 2006

By Monica Mead Correspondent

WATERBURY – Andrée Falardeau is happy. Her employees are happy.

Falardeau and her eight-person crew are stretched out in their new Waterbury headquarters, tenants in the new Pilgrim V building since early March. They formerly were cramped into an 800-square-foot office in Waitsfield that served as product development center as well as sales hub, with a warehouse facility in Berlin.

Canus, founded in the mid-1990s by Falardeau, a native of Quebec City, and her Canadian partner, André Beauregard, sells a line of all-natural skin care products based on one essential ingredient: goat's milk. The company produces roughly 1 million bars of soap each month out of its northern Montreal facility, according to press information. The product is shipped to retailers worldwide.

"It was tight," said Falardeau of the old office space. "It did the job for a while, but (the warehouse) was a retail space, not really a warehouse. It wasn't very efficient."

She credits her new landlords, Stephen Van Esen and Edward Steele of Pilgrim Partnership, with developing the new headquarters based on plans from Falardeau.

"They basically took the design that I wanted to use in Waitsfield," she said, "and just blew it up."

Office space now stretches out over 4,000 square feet, while an adjacent warehouse has 7,300 square feet with 40-foot-high ceilings.

"This was a good move," said Falardeau. "It was a very good move."

After dealing for years in "surplus inventories" of everything from health products to clothes, Falardeau was approached by a skin-care products manufacturer to market a new line. She looked to two of her biggest retailers for advice.

One of the retailers advised her to look at niche products instead, she said. And, Falardeau said, the all-natural products category – an industry sector which still sees growth of roughly 25 percent every year – held promise.

Though she passed on representing the product, the advice gave impetus to the idea that blossomed into Canus.



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After researching available natural ingredients, she "stumbled onto goat's milk." An effective skin care component used worldwide, it was a little-tapped ingredient in North America, a factor that appealed to Falardeau and and Beauregard.

They developed what would be the anchor product in the Canus line — a triple-milled goat's milk soap, which still sells today.

Looking to sell their "line" (prematurely consisting of only one product), Canus approached retailers. Some refused to carry the product, insisting on standard industry slotting fees. Falardeau looked for alternative venues. As it turned out, key retailer, Brooks, though corporately run in the United States, was franchised in Canada. Falardeau and Beauregard knocked on every franchisee's door.

"It sold," she said. "After a year, we were in all the stores."

Subsequent products were introduced and by 2000 Canus products were available from Canada to the Philippines.

Falardeau said it didn't take long before Canus had a recognized brand.

"Three years later, we were the number-two-selling bar of soap in Canada, after Dove," a ranking which still holds true, said Falardeau.

Making a move to the United States in 2000, Falardeau set up Canus' American headquarters, what is now Canus Vermont LLC. The companies are affiliated at the production level, but operated separately.

In 2003 Canus launched the Li'l Goat's Milk product line for children, garnering attention from the likes of Denzel Washington who purchased a basket full for newborn twins of actress Julia Roberts, said Falardeau.

Though guarded about current financial statistics, Falardeau has an impressive roster of North American retailers including Rhode Island-based Brooks pharmacy, Safeway and Whole Foods.

Falardeau said facial cream and a line of shampoos and conditioners are on tap, as well as a continued focus on all-natural ingredients with special attention to non-synthetic, sustainable botanicals.

"That's where the market's growing," she said.

Canus Vermont is a sponsor at Earthfest in Boston on May 27, where 100,000 people are expected. Falardeau plans on being there, handing out soap to folks and talking up the benefits of goat's milk.



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