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Posted: Tuesday, March 1, 2016 12:00 am

Ian Kraft

Filled with an idea he had while backpacking in Uruguay, countless hours in his mother's kitchen, and a master's degree in nonprofit leadership and management from Arizona State University, Jeff Malkoon is putting his own twist on peanut butter.

An alumnus of St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic School, and Arcadia resident, Malkoon started his tenure at ASU as a business major.

"I started off in the business program at ASU, and I realized at one point... 'This is not for me,'" Malkoon said. "I took a semester to take courses that just looked interesting and wound up taking a couple of global studies courses, so I ended up majoring in that."

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During the next decade he propelled himself to becoming one of Arizona's top entrepreneurs under the age of 35 in 2014, as named by The Arizona Republic.

Malkoon has called Arcadia his home for more than 25 years, yet the idea behind Peanut Butter Americano came from a backpacking trip in Uruguay.

"Two weeks after graduating [from ASU], I was in South America on a backpacking trip...It's there that I got the idea to start a nut butter company," Malkoon said.

Malkoon said he was appalled at how many people were eating dulce de leche, a popular Latin American spread, when Uruguay is home to such a great protein source in peanuts.

"One day when I was walking around in Uruguay, I saw a mother giving her child some dulce de leche," Malkoon said. "Instantly, I knew I needed more. I wanted to understand why the people there preferred dulce de leche to nut butter."

He realized that peanuts were being exported to the United States, where nut butter was made, and then exported back to Uruguay for \$15 per pound from brands such as Skippy and Jif. "Stuff that [Uruguayans] don't really care for," Malkoon said.

He said that was the moment when he asked himself, "Why don't we create a line of creamier and sweeter nut butters and expose people in the international community to better options?"

Malkoon returned home to the comfort of his parent's house in Arcadia where he began to create his flavors of peanut butter.

"I feel like I grew up on Camelback. It's a great community," said Malkoon when explaining why he chose to return home.

Over the next 10 years, Malkoon established PB Americano as a legitimate player in the nut butter industry with the introduction of six flavors of peanut and almond butter, such as dark chocolate peanut butter and cinnamon roasted almond butter.

Malkoon also said that the butters are produced by hand at a factory in Phoenix, and guarantees that it is the freshest nut butter in the Valley.

PB Americano can be found in more than 30 outlets around Arizona, including Whole Foods and The Mayo Clinic, as well as local farmers markets in Tempe and Phoenix.

"The most important thing to me that's happened over the past couple years is our growth of the company in the community," Malkoon said.

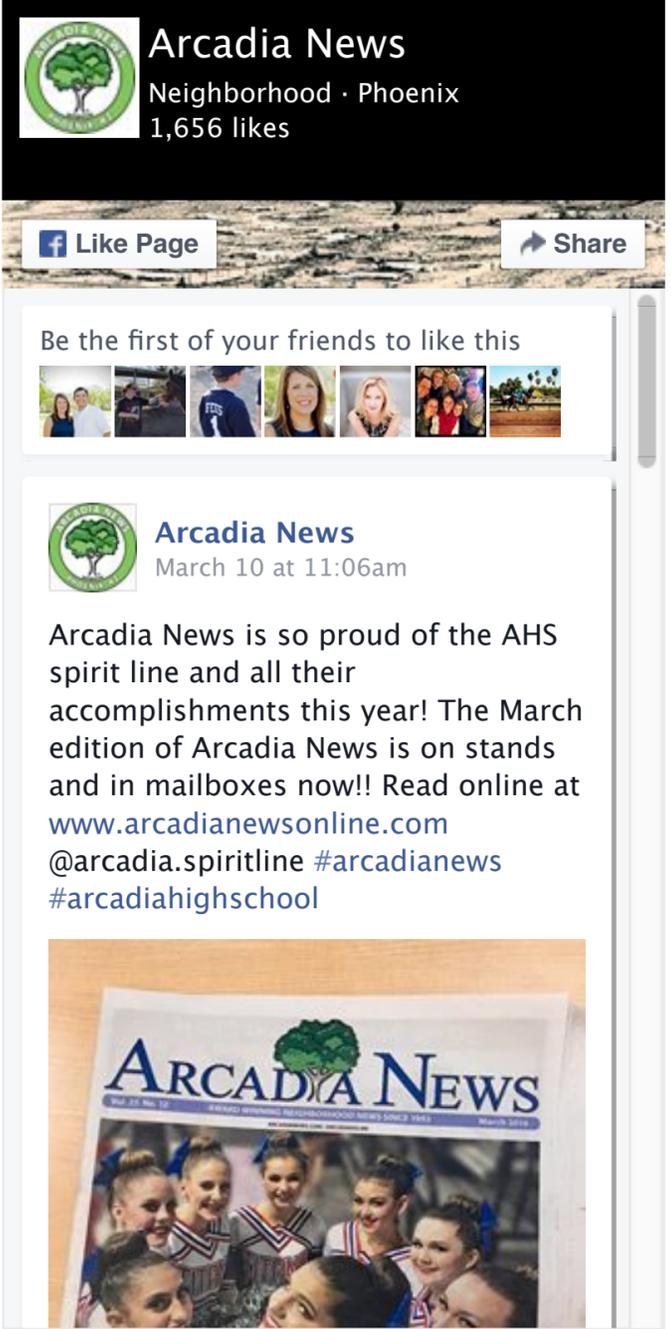
"So many individuals from the community have been supportive," he reflected. "I wouldn't be sitting here if they didn't come out and support my product."

He added that his entire family has backed him. "From my mom and my dad whose kitchen I started making nut butters in, to my grandmother and my aunt who helped me decorate my office."

Malkoon said he is looking to the future with PB Americano, and he has never lost sight of his ultimate goal of helping South Americans.

"I would love to see [South Americans] producing their own nut butter," Malkoon said. "I wanted to create a line of nut butter that people would enjoy in the international community as well as in the United States. That's why I started Peanut Butter Americano."

For more information on Jeff and PB Americano, go to pbamericano.com, or visit the PB Americano headquarters located at 4700 N. Central Avenue, Suite 107 in Phoenix.



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