

How They Did It

UNWRAPPING THE POTENTIAL

Former Army Reservist bought an old candy company and sweetened the profits.

BY DEIDRE WENGEN

CHRISTINE LANTINEN MAY HAVE

been initially attracted to the Army Reserve because of a “cute” recruitment officer, but her decision to enlist during her junior year of high school was more than just a teenage fling. Lantinen says that after considering the educational opportunities provided by a service career, enlisting made a lot of sense.

During her last two years of high school, Lantinen trained during the summers, and completed her basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., while still in school. After graduating, she went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to complete

gift company that began in the kitchen of its eponymous creator in St. Paul, Minn., in 1907, and grew into a burgeoning business with several retail locations in the Twin Cities area. While working for another food-gift company called Bay Island as the sales and marketing director, Lantinen was approached by the owner of Maud Borup and asked to help get the brand and its products into big retail stores. After securing placement in stores such as Target and Walmart, Lantinen eventually brokered a buy-out agreement with the Maud Borup owner and took over control of the brand.

“Closing the retail stores was a really hard decision,” she says. “But in looking at the business, the stores just weren’t profitable. We decided to take the great products that were done on a small scale and offer them wholesale in the market so we could get them out to a lot more people.”

To meet the needs of the growing business, Lantinen says that the company contracts with large-scale chocolate and candy manufacturers in order to put out the quantity needed to supply major retail chains. However, she stresses that the quality of the products, as well as the look and feel of the brand, remains exactly the same as it did when it was founded.

“This company has a long, rich tradition, and it was important for me to keep the same items that had been carried in the retail stores,” says Lantinen. “We worked with larger manufacturing facilities to create the same type of hand-done processes. I didn’t want to lose that.”

Maud Borup is continuing to evolve and launch innovative and fun offerings. Just last year, the company debuted a new product called Eco Egg, an all-natural, compostable, American-made Easter egg. Eco Egg is now a division of Maud Borup and is carried in specialty stores across the country.

Lantinen says that her best advice for veterans who are considering starting a business is just to “go for it.” However, she warns prospective business owners against biting off more than they can chew at the very beginning.

“Try to start with as little money as you need to get off the ground,” she says. “I feel like too many people jump into a big loan or a big building, and they get under water. But if you know the business and you’re determined, you’ll find a way to make it happen.” ☺



her medical training and served for 10 years between 1991 and 2001—finishing just before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Lantinen says that her time in the Army Reserve provided her with a strong foundation and the educational background to launch what has become an incredibly successful career as a retail mogul.

“There are so many great things that came from my military experience that I think makes me a great leader today,” she says. “The foundation that you get from the military is incredible as far as grounding you as a person and teaching you to work as a team.”

In 2005, Lantinen took the helm of Maud Borup, a century-old candy and

“It really was an opportunity for me to buy the brand, go out on my own and start selling it into these larger accounts that I had worked with for a number of years,” she says. “I’d spent a lot of time in the industry and felt comfortable doing it on my own when I made the move.”

When Lantinen purchased the company, the business was bringing in about \$100,000 in revenue through wholesale orders and its retail store locations. But in order to grow the business, Lantinen made some tough decisions and changed the entire Maud Borup operating model. She closed all of the retail locations and focused on building the wholesale opportunities. This year, Lantinen says the company is on track to do \$15 million in sales.