

the TASTE OF SUCCESS

Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams of Columbus, Ohio, is a small company with some big ideas to help get your business to the next level.

By Pete Mihalek

Sometimes we just hate it when our favorite *band* goes mainstream. But on the contrary, when a favorite *brand* goes Main Street, we couldn't be any prouder. That's because witnessing a small business succeed is a reflection of the community it's based in.

Simply put, smart communities reward good business acumen. And Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams of Columbus, Ohio, is a fine example of just that.

With interest-piquing flavors like Yazoo Sue With Rosemary Bar Nuts and Queen City Cayenne to Sweet Corn & Black Raspberries and Sweet Potato With Torched Marshmallow, Jeni's isn't your typical freezer-section ice cream vendor.

At around \$10 a pint, quality comes at a price. But according to Jeni's CEO John Lowe, the company's authenticity, community service, genuine staff and exceptional product quality are ingredients that make this product well worth every spoonful.

Leading up to his speaking engagement at the Next Level event in Nashville, Jan. 31 - Feb.

2, John took a few minutes out of his busy schedule to answer a few questions for *Lawn & Garden Retailer* about marketing, going local and customer service.

Marketing — How does Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams use social media to its advantage?

John Lowe: We use social media to give a peek into our kitchen. The way we make ice cream is unlike other ice cream companies, and we do our best to show that. For instance, our Sweet Corn with Black Raspberries starts with us shucking Ohio sweet corn. We have a video that captures the process.

Social media is perfect for a company like ours that is authentic and open and also doesn't have the budget to tell our story through more traditional advertising.

Personality — Social media aside, what do you do to put a face to Jeni's?

Lowe: A company's personality cannot be faked. It pains me to see companies like Ford and GE (my former employer) try to have a schtick on social media. If it isn't authentic, don't do it. Period.

Our personality is easy. It reflects Jeni and our team. That Jeni has developed into a bit of a celebrity is certainly beneficial to selling ice cream — and the book becoming a best-seller and Jeni receiving the James Beard award for it are tremendous assets to us. It helps other people explain that there is a reason our ice cream is better - our ice creams are made by the best craftsperson making ice cream today. She has spent the better part of the last 16 years honing her craft on hard cement floors, making every batch and serving every customer.

Community — How has Jeni's positively impacted the very community from which it got its start?

Photos provided by Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams, Columbus, Ohio.



"We exist for two reasons: to make the best ice creams possible, and to make the world a better place."

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OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY

Lowe: We exist for two reasons: to make the best ice creams possible, and to make the world a better place. Woody Allen said success had enabled him to strike out with a higher class of woman. Our success has enabled us to better support the organizations that we have been close to from the beginning. For example, Jeni is a founding member of Local-Matters, an organization created before 99 percent of us had ever heard of the phrase "Eat local."

We look to Chipotle as a model. It has remained true to its roots in many — maybe not all — ways, and its success has enabled the company to very meaningfully impact the World through its sourcing and its charitable giving. We like to think we are doing something similar — just on a much smaller scale.

We recently sponsored FarmAid, which is something we would not have been able to dream of previously, but that is right in line with our goals of supporting family farmers. The aim of that organization is great, and we were happy to write a check to their foundation. Additionally, we have long supported VeggieU, and we are now able to do so with a larger check each year, which feels good for our team.

Competition — How has Jeni's used its locally owned branding to stand out from the litany of mainstream ice creams brands?

Lowe: It isn't about branding. It has to be about quality and service. If our ice cream was the same quality — or frankly, if it was even close to the quality of whatever was down the street, we wouldn't exist. If an uninspired franchise could give the same level of customer service we give in our stores, we wouldn't have stores.

We have to be better — a lot better — because there are brands, marketers and monied brains that can do everything else better than us. Everything, that is, except make ice cream and give great service.

Experience — Which steps do you take to ensure your staff maintains the Jeni's message and high-quality experience to customers walking in off the street?

Lowe: Ensuring the quality of our shop customer service has to be in our top three priorities at all times. It is really difficult to do retail well. Retail is detail, so the saying goes, and finding people that get the importance of the shop experience is not easy, but it is crucial.

We try to get people through an orientation that includes quality time with Jeni, so they can hear her talk about customer service and the shop experience; and they get to spend time with myself and other company leaders so they get that this is personal.

Our entire team is 100 percent tied up in the service they are giving. We need them to be great. We would love it if Jeni could serve every customer. She can't, so they have to be as good as Jeni. They have to know the flavors, what goes well together, what ingredients are in each, etc. We don't do it perfectly every time, but there isn't a team in the world I would rather compete with than ours. **LGR**



John Lowe, CEO of Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams, along with founder and namesake Jeni Britton Bauer will be sharing their experiences at the Next Level event in Nashville, January 31 - February 2. *Next Level* is a new business education event that represents the first major collaboration between ANLA and OFA.



WHAT'S YOUR NEXT LEVEL?

by Mike McCabe, OFA President

next LEVEL™

You. Your Team. Your Business.

Everyone has a next level. I have a next level – for my business, my team and even myself. What is your next level, and what will it take to get there? These are some of the questions we'll get answers to at the Next Level event in Nashville, January 31 - February 2. I am excited about this dynamic new conference that OFA and ANLA have created for our industry. We can join our innovative, energetic peers, hear nationally recognized speakers and network with industry experts for this three-day conference.

Your Personal Action Plan

If you're like me, you want to get to the next level. But to get to the next level you need a goal, support and a plan. In addition to business-building sessions with innovative speakers and trusted industry experts, at the Next Level event you will choose one of the goals below, and join a group of peers in a "hub" where you will create a personal plan of action to achieve it. The hubs are:

- Just selling more isn't enough. How do I grow my business?
- What is my legacy? A strong business for my kids or a successful exit?
- How do I reinvent my business to thrive in the changing economy?
- What do I want from my life and my business? And how do I have it all?
- How do I grow my profession into a successful career? What do I want my job to be in the future?

Keynote Speakers

Big changes, big accomplishments and big dreams take big ideas. The Next Level keynote speakers will inspire big thoughts. Ever heard international best-selling author and speaker Tony Robbins? You've heard of him because one of our keynote speakers, Chip Eichelberger, spent six years promoting and training for Robbins.

The other keynote speaker, Barry Moltz, gets business owners growing again by unlocking their long-forgotten potential. With decades of entrepreneurial experience in his own business ventures, as well as consulting countless other entrepreneurs, Barry has discovered the formula to get stuck business owners unstuck and marching forward. Barry will help us apply simple, strategic steps to facilitate change in our business, our teams and our lives.

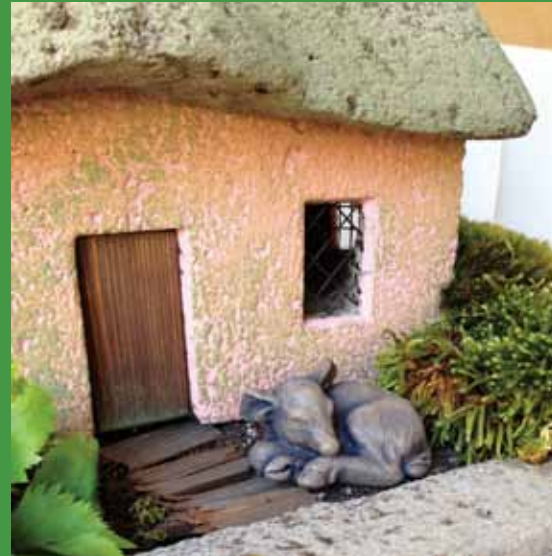
Experience Gaylord Opryland

The Next Level event will be at the Gaylord Opryland Resort in Nashville, a perfect location for this new conference that mixes the excitement of Music City with the power of horticulture. Gaylord Opryland has 9 acres of indoor gardens that include 50,000 tropical plants. Maintained by 20 full-time horticulturists, the colorful interior landscape offers meticulously kept gardens in a climate-controlled environment. I am looking forward to seeing this resort.

Nationally recognized speakers, industry experts and a world-class hotel can't create a successful event without the right attendees. I'm excited that many of my fellow leaders at OFA and ANLA — dynamic, smart, creative women and men — have told me they will be at the Next Level. We want you to be a part of this exciting community. Join us! Next Level won't be the same without you.

Visit www.yournextlevel.org to learn more.

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