

NOTEBOOK

Freeze Pops Grow Up

Jim Picariello's booming business began as a simple pleasure. "My wife and I spent a year on Cliff Island in Casco Bay, and my favorite thing to do was drink jasmine tea with just tons of honey," recalls the former graphic and website designer.

One day he came across a mold for making ice pops, and one thing led to another. "My wife and I said, 'Wow, this is really good.'" Two years later, inspiration struck.

"I woke up at four in the morning, and asked myself, 'Does anybody make these?'" recalls Picariello. He spent the rest of the night prowling the Internet for similar products, and came up empty-handed.

Turning early morning inspiration into a real product wasn't easy, though. After learning the ropes of the natural foods industry, he developed a business plan, won three seed grants from the Maine Technology Institute, and worked with the University of Maine to develop flavors and manufacturing plans.

The product is Frostea, and they're freeze pops grown up and healthy: all natural, locally produced tea popsicles flavored with hon-

ey and maple syrup. They won the Most Innovative New Product award at the Natural Foods Expo East in 2007, catching the eye of nationwide retailers.

Frosteas are now available throughout the northeast. Picariello and his company, Wise Acre, recently moved into a 2,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, where he can produce in a single hour what used to take him two 12-hour days.

Despite all the accolades and business deals, the food entrepreneur maintains that staying humble is the key to his success. "I'm a big nerd, so opening up a food

science book and learning isn't all that hard for me," says Picariello. "But I've taken it to heart that I can't know everything, so I constantly ask for help, and that's what's kept me going."

