

Hawai'i SBDC Success Story – Maui Center

Elle's Maui Kitchen

Cultivating Island Style Marinade Using Some of Hawaii's Freshest Local Ingredients



Agnes Dinh and Gary Lee loved barbecuing but never imagined their 'secret' sauce for family gatherings could result in anything but a bunch of satisfied palettes –certainly not a family-owned business. With the addition of a baby daughter, however, they were inspired to do something more that would provide for this new family.

They approached the Hawaii SBDC in early 2016 to explore what it would take to start a business. Per Agnes, *"the Maui SBDC office was instrumental in guiding us and validating our idea. We were referred to the right food group resources to obtain food permits, food safety requirements, labeling and barcode requirements and bottle manufacturing."* **Elle's Maui Kitchen** was born, featuring **Elle's Island Style Marinades**, a unique blend of flavors from

fresh local ingredients that differs from the rest of the brands on the shelves. Its sweet yet savory flavors offer versatility allowing it to be paired with meats, seafood, and vegetables.

The SBDC advisor encouraged and prepared the company for a debut at the largest products show in Maui County; **Made in Maui County Festival**, a two-day annual event that introduces local product vendors to state-wide buyers and distributors on one day and is open to the public for retail on the second day. **Elle's Island Style Marinade** was a hit and sold out their complete inventory. Equally significant, wholesale contacts made at the show enabled Elle's Maui Kitchen to secure accounts with six significant wholesale venues. Additional interest in foreign exports are being negotiated with Canada, Japan and Korea.

Since the company's inception, Elle's Kitchen has become a proud participant of the Made in Hawaii with Aloha and Hawaii Seal of Quality programs. It is a privilege to qualify for these programs and represent the cream of the crop of Hawaii's producers, establishing and protecting the integrity and value of products that are Hawaii made or grown.

It was frightening for both Agnes and Gary to quit their 'day' jobs to work full time in the business. But with the guidance the SBDC provided and the knowledge that the SBDC will be there for the next stages of their business development, Agnes and Gary feel confident that they can quickly overcome any challenges in growing their new business. Stay tuned for further updates.

Elle's Maui Kitchen can be found online at: <http://ellesmauikitchen.com/> and <http://www.facebook.com/ellesmauikitchen>.