Agribusiness entrepreneur

Carlos Piana is a quintessential entrepreneur, always returning to his interest in agribusiness.

In the early 1980s, he and his father produced rice and soybeans. When he enrolled in the MAB in 1999, they were exporting mangoes from Ecuador. They contemplated constructing a processing plant for acerola, the vitamin C “super fruit,” for export to Brazil and Japan. At the time, the shrimp export industry was booming and a shrimp businessman expressed interest in financing Carlos’ acerola plant. However, a series of adverse events stopped their plans short: the shrimp monoculture was wiped out by the “mancha blanca” (white stain) viral disease, agriculture was devastated by the el Niño phenomenon of 1997-’98, and half of the banks of Ecuador failed the following year. Carlos eventually sold the factory and looked for opportunities outside the sector.

On a trip to the U.S., he bought the exclusive Ecuador franchise rights for Novus Windshield Repair and Replacement. The company franchises automated windshield repair and replacement equipment that allows franchisees to offer full windshield services (polishing, repair, and replacement). The business caught his eye because as a consumer he felt defrauded by the quality of service available in the Ecuador. After acquiring the franchise rights, he went to Chile for orientation, trained his staff, and set up shop.

The wake-up call came when Carlos realized that used car dealers – those most likely to demand his services – were not interested in investing in the more expensive protective glass used by Novus. Although Carlos also imported Allied windshields, car dealers were more likely to buy supplies on the black market in “exploding” glass that had emerged, notwithstanding the dangers this presented to drivers and passengers. Nevertheless, the Novus business was successful, and Carlos sold franchises in two cities...until he realized that at least one of the franchisees was not using the standard resin when installing windshields that gives Novus its value. He cancelled one franchise, and when a business colleague expressed interest in Novus, Carlos sold his rights and got out.

By the time he put Novus behind him in 2006, Carlos was already working for Universal Sweet Industries (USI), where he is now Head of Procurement. Entrepre neur Isabel Noboa de Loor used her inheritance from plantation baron father Luis Noboa to build an empire of her own. Today, she is President of Nobis, a consortium of companies that includes real estate, commercial, and agribusiness enterprises including USI. When one of Ecuador’s leading confectionery companies, La Universal established in 1889, went bankrupt, Nestle bought up some of the brands. But the factory where Carlos works today stood empty until USI bought the remaining assets six years after the bankruptcy.

“I am not sure why, but Nestle did not buy some of the much-loved brands and USI eventually acquired them. Today, we compete with Nestle,” he said (www.launiversal.com).

Carlos started at USI working in cocoa procurement. This is a complex area that requires knowledge of bean production and processing as well as familiarity with the world cocoa market and factors affecting demand, supply and prices. However, Carlos was already familiar with the industry, which proved to be useful. USI spends $6 million annually on cacao. Although USI started with multiple producers, they now have a network of three to four producers that can provide the quality, volume, and price USI needs to remain competitive.

Carlos was also responsible for exports. Since La Universal is a historic brand, many of the three million Ecuadorians living on the East Coast of the U.S.

**Piana continued on pg 7**

Nate Smith, class of 2011, and his family welcomed Aiden Kendrick Smith to the family on December 27th. Nate also accepted a new position as Territory Finance Manager for John Deere in KS and MO.

Sosthenes Mwansa, class of 2013, has accepted the Senior Credit Officer position with Vision Fund Zambia.

Audra Weber, class of 2012, is moving to Thibodaux, LA where she accepted a position as the Factory Order Fulfillment Manager within John Deere Company.

Ben Smith, class of 2011, welcomed a new baby boy to the world. Liam Gene Smith was born December 13, 2011.

Clair Doan, class of 2009, and family welcomed a new baby on Monday, February 6th. Sophia Elizabeth Sadie Doan weighed 6lbs 9oz and was 20.5 inches long.

Charles Loubersac d’Hotel, class of 2012, and his wife, Marie, had a baby boy, Paul, on November 1st of last year.

Martin Mwansa, class of 2013, and his wife have a new baby girl named Joyce. He now also works as a Provincial Marketing Coordinator for the Luapula region under the Food Reserve Agency.

Michelle Evosovich Adams, class of 2006, is now employed as Production Planner for Pacific Nutritional, Inc. in Vancouver, WA.

Meng Tee, class of 2009, and his wife had a new baby, Jonah on September 29th. He also started a new position within the agriculture industry as a Horticulture Consultant.

Alison Rosenblum, class of 2004, moved within Coffee Bean International and is now the Director of Strategic Account Development.

Leah Suellentrop, class of 2002, had a baby, Betty May Suellentrop, on July 2, 2011.