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New business roasts coffee beans from around the globe

By SHEILA RHOADES



Old Canal Coffee

Roasters conjures not

only the aroma of rich, roasted coffee found throughout the world, but also a feeling of comfort through the enjoyment of life's simple pleasures.

Steve Clouse shows off the roasting machine. Plain Dealer photo by GREG DANNACHER

That's how Steve Clouse sees his new business which sits alongside Modoc's Market on Miami Street in downtown Wabash. He and his wife, Val opened for business in October.

Clouse enlists the help of brokers who travel around the world finding just the right beans for roasting. If you think that's a stretch, consider this: His beans come from Guatemala, Costa Rica, Brazil, Peru, Africa, Ethiopia and Kenya. They arrive in burlap bags, newly ripened and ready for roasting.

Clouse sources premium green Arabica coffees from across the globe, hand-roasts to order on a fluid bed roaster and packages the freshly roasted beans on the spot.

He has studied beans for several years and buys from select growers.

"My brokers scour the world for the best beans, but I only work with cooperatives that treat the farmers and labor properly," Clouse explained. "Especially in the Third World countries. We only want 'fair trade' coffees."

The beans are all hand-picked and never touched by machine, he said. His fluid bed roaster heats the beans by heater fan, which continues to move the beans around while browning them to the desired length of time.

The process takes from 15 to 20 minutes and fills the air with the aroma of coffee. Clouse has his roaster situated in his front window and the apparatus is vented outside so the aroma can be shared with any passersby. A strategically placed mirror allows visitors on the sidewalk to look into the hopper during the roasting process.

His beans are then packaged in half-pound bags and displayed next door at Modoc's. Angie Beauchamp, owner of Modoc's, will even grind the coffee in-store.

Customers can choose from a variety of single-origin coffees, including Colombian Supremo, French Roast Colombian, Costa Rica "Royal" Tarrazu, Ethiopian Harrar Blue Sun, Kenya AA, Mexican Cristal Huatusco and more. There are special blended coffees such as Espresso and Plantation House Roast, or you may want to try one of many flavored coffees offered, such as Ameretto, Butterscotch Toffee, Chocolate Macadamia, Highlander Grog or - a store favorite - French Caramel Creme. The list is staggering and seemingly endless as customers are invited to create their own blends.

As if shade-grown, special roast, high-end coffee isn't enough, Val Clouse offers up her specialty ... chocolate.

She makes her own chocolate creations, which - wittingly or unwittingly - complement the coffee varieties.

She offers turtles (pecan), chocolate dipped pretzels, chocolate coated spoons, chocolate Oreos on a stick, chocolate covered peppermint sticks, truffles and chocolate covered espresso beans. She also makes chocolate covered strawberries, cherries and blueberries.

She also creates gift baskets using customer selections or items of her own choosing. So whether it's Valentine's

Day, Mother's Day or just a special day for a special someone, Val Clouse can customize a basket for any occasion.

The Clouses are no strangers to the area. Their business has ties to the area going back through six generations of artisans and farmers.

The former Val Tipple grew up in Lagro, attended Northfield High School and was active in 4-H, where she was known for her chocolate and gift-making talents.

Following a successful business in Florida and a stint in Seattle, where Clouse researched roasting methods and equipment, the Clouses returned to Wabash County.

"We came back to take advantage of the great schools, here," Clouse said. He still practices his original job as management consultant, but says he has "slowed down" somewhat. He has also written some software for private industry and takes on special projects in the corporate world.

The apparent stretch from management consulting to coffee roaster seems a large one. Not so, says Clouse.

"It's really rather similar," he said with a smile. "I just went from bean counting to bean roasting."

Old Canal Coffee Roasters is located at 209 S. Miami St. Clouse ships wholesale and retail and is currently developing regular routes. For more information call toll-free, 866-472-0770.