



WYSIWYG Juice Company (June 2016)

BY GRACE WEBB

Kristi Schuck and Marie Farley Christensen met under the worst of circumstances.

The two women were attending a support group in Mankato for people who lost their spouses to cancer. In Farley Christensen's case, her husband, Bob, had passed away nearly 10 years previously after a fight with colorectal cancer. Schuck's husband, Wes, had passed away only months earlier from the same disease.

As the women talked and shared their struggles, they came to discover many other things they shared—from the number of kids they have (three each) to their deep interest in nutrition, which they used to help their husbands achieve the best quality of life possible despite deteriorating health. The more time they spent together, the stronger their friendship grew.

One particular interest they shared was juicing. In fact, Schuck was so passionate about its good effects she decided to start her own juicing business. Almost as soon as she made the decision, Farley Christensen came on board as partner. Together, they opened WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) in January.

Theirs is a poignant story of turning life's tragedies into blessings—and they're only getting started.

Kristi's story

Schuck grew up in Minnetonka and studied health science and exercise physiology at Gustavus Adolphus College. She met husband Wes there and married him in 1997 after they graduated. They moved to Mankato and opened several businesses, including a recording studio. In addition, Schuck started offering fitness classes at the Mankato YMCA.

In 2001, 36-year-old Wes was diagnosed with stage-four colorectal cancer and told he only had about four months to live. Instead of despairing in the face of such a bleak diagnosis, the couple began aggressively researching other health options to supplement the chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

"We were stunned to get this diagnosis, but we were also very much realistic about it," Schuck explained. "We thought, 'There's more to this than cancer—there's also health.' So we just went gangbusters on how to support his health. And we left the cancer to the medical world. We knew we needed them in partnership. But we knew focusing on health was what helped us thrive every day and really just honor the quality of life."

The first step was cleaning up Wes's diet, which quickly led to the rest of the family following suit.

"My oldest daughter, who was 10, asked, 'Well if Dad's eating this way because he has cancer, shouldn't we all eat this way since we don't want cancer?'" Schuck said. "Our whole family just jumped on board. It took some time. It wasn't like all of a sudden we sat down to this happy meal of brussels sprouts. But after a while, everybody came along, and we started enjoying brussels sprouts."

Schuck also developed a deep interest in juicing, pulling out a previously unused juicer she had received as a wedding present 14 years earlier. She said juicing greatly helped her husband.

"I'd see Wes spend days with chemotherapy and turn around within 20 minutes, saying, 'Oh, I'm heading off to work and feel fantastic,' with a juice in his hand," she remembers. "He would say, 'I feel like I can do anything. This disease has no grip on me at all.'"

Wes passed away in 2015 after a four-year fight. He had much more time than originally predicted; but, more importantly, but he had a much better life during the time he had.

Marie's story

Farley Christensen grew up in St. James, Minnesota and attended Augsburg College to study marketing and economics. While in college, she met husband Bob, whom she married in 1990. The two of them moved to Wisconsin after graduation. In 2006, 34-year-old Bob was diagnosed with colorectal cancer and given only 18 months to live.

"We just turned the house upside-down," Farley Christensen recalled. "When you have little kids [ages 2, 4 and 6 at the time], and you're faced with a diagnosis like that, we really asked ourselves, 'How can we give him the best chance possible?'"

The family moved back to Minnesota shortly afterwards, and Farley Christensen really started paying closer attention to what was on the dinner table—and in everyone's glasses.

"I got rid of everything unhealthy," she said. "I remember going through my pantry and cleaning out the closet. I gave everything away."

The family switched to organic foods and raw juices with no glutes or sugars. It was a time-consuming task to make such health-conscious decisions and meals, but Farley Christensen said the choices had clear benefits.

"When Bob was going through chemo and radiation and surgeries, he said, 'How can it be that when I'm as sick as I've ever been in my life, I feel the greatest I've ever felt?'" she said.

Ultimately, Bob lived for another four years after receiving the diagnosis.

"There were so many miracles along the way," Farley Christensen said. "He outlived everyone's expectations."

The business

Schuck and Farley Christensen met at a LIVESTRONG support group in September 2015 and also became work acquaintances at the Mankato YMCA, where they both led fitness classes.

"It was just amazing, how similar our stories were," Farley Christensen said. "For the first time, I had somebody to talk to. I just adored her."

As the friendship grew, Schuck shared an idea that she had been mulling over for some time: starting her own juice bar. She had become inspired by all the juice bars her husband found while he was traveling for business, and how helpful they had been when it came to eating right—which could be very difficult because of the limited options in the area.

"We'd ask ourselves, 'Where can we eat that we wouldn't have to sacrifice the integrity of our choices to eat nutritiously based on our health?'" she said. "There didn't exist a place like this yet, to this degree."

Schuck asked Farley Christensen if she wanted to invest in the business plan, but her friend went even further, becoming a partner.

"I just knew that if we could offer this to everybody, it would be a gift," she explained. "Most people, I believe, would eat or drink healthy if it was easy. It's a lot of work (though). We really want to offer that nutrition to the people of Mankato."

Since opening about six months ago, they already have about 20 employees. They use as many local organic suppliers as they can. Their menu includes all organic, gluten-free foods from non-GMO sources. Perhaps the most popular items are their 100 percent raw juices, which are bottled fresh every day, but there are also smoothies, salads, desserts, coffees and more, including vegan and vegetarian options.

The business may be fairly new to the Mankato scene, but it has already received a lot of positive attention.

“The support has been just beyond our wildest dreams,” Schuck said. “We’ve been so embraced, and we feel so blessed and so fortunate. It’s really exciting.”

The women say they hope to establish their current location as the WYSIWYG flagship store, before branching out into catering, distributing to local stores and gyms, and starting a franchise.

Wherever the business leads them, though, they say they’re committed to offering nutritious choices to their customers.

“Regardless of the number of your days, it really is about the quality of your days,” Farley Christensen said. “When you are diagnosed with cancer, hope just always rises to the top. It comes in so many different ways. And we just chose to bring that here: hoping tomorrow nutritionally, you might be a better version of yourself. There’s many things in the illness that you cannot control, but your nutrition is one that you have direct input into, and that you can enhance to give yourself the best life, whether it’s cancer or just daily nutrition.”

Grace Webb is a wandering reporter whose home base is Mankato.

Not all creations are equally tasty

When it comes to the juices on WYSIWYG’s menu, some have long histories and some are new experiments. Many of the juices come from recipes Farley Christensen and Schuck created with their husbands.

“There are a lot of juices that are from our past, that are part of our history that we used in our family recipes,” Schuck said.

She admitted that some ingredients blended together better than others.

“Once, Wes and I said, ‘Let’s try juicing turnips,’” Schuck remembers. “You won’t see turnips on the menu, because they didn’t turn out so well. But he tried it. Our husbands were kind of our crash test dummies.”

“They were victims of many juices,” Farley Christensen agreed, “and some were just terrible.”

The women still experiment with new recipes now, crediting their complementary taste palettes. You never know what you’ll see on the menu—but there’s a pretty good chance you’ll like it.