

LAKE PLACID NEWS

SAVOR THE SEASON: Forest Farmers acquires Parker's Maple brand

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LAKE PLACID — Three years ago, Mike Farrell left his job as director of Cornell University's Uihlein Maple Forest, a 200-acre research and extension field station on Bear Cub Lane. Now he's making big news working for the company he co-founded, The Forest Farmers.

Based in Lyon Mountain, The Forest Farmers produces a variety of tree syrups under the New Leaf Tree Syrups brand, including maple, maple walnut, maple birch, birch and beech. He's been the CEO of the business full time for the past three years, but he still lives in Lake Placid.

His company is growing to more markets in the nation, having recently acquired Parker's Real Maple brand from Canton-area resident Joshua Park, who is in his early 20s. Parker's produces maple butter, maple cotton candy and maple syrup.

The acquisition is a key move for The Forest Farmers, who are keeping Parker on as the new sales and marketing manager.

"It allows us to greatly expand our sales and distribution nationwide," Farrell said on Monday, June 22. "It's especially important right now during the COVID pandemic. We were focused more on the food service, restaurant sector, and that's been hit pretty hard. So now this allows us to take our products that we've been making a lot of — we have tremendous production capacity — and it helps us marry supply and demand."

The Forest Farmers taps trees in about 10,000 acres of forest — 7,000 in New York and 3,000 in Vermont. Farrell co-founded the company in 2015 when he was still at Cornell University's Uihlein Maple Forest.

That was around the time he met Parker, a teenager from the hamlet of Pyrites near Canton who Parker began making maple syrup at the age of 11 as a hobby. Parker founded his business in 2013 at the age of 15 — taking out a loan and tapping about 3,000 trees on the family farm — after attending the Cornell Maple Camp, a four-day intensive training for training maple producers. Parker was, by far, the youngest attendee. Farrell was the teacher.

“Then he got on ‘Shark Tank’ and it just exploded,” Farrell said about the ABC television show where entrepreneurs pitch investment opportunities to venture capitalists. Parker was looking for \$200,000 in return for 20% of the business.

Parker’s company received 7,000 orders the first week after his “Shark Tank” appearance, according to a report in the Watertown Daily Times. Farrell said Parker’s has 3,000 points of distribution throughout the country, including accounts with Walmart, Whole Foods and Wegman’s.

The acquisition will enable The Forest Farmers to expand supply of organic tree syrup and forest-based offerings across the country. The Forest Farmers mission to promote proper forest stewardship and sustainable harvesting through the development of wild forest-derived products will continue to apply to both brands.