



The Clark family left to right: Jon, Penny, Joel and Richard.

SAM FEATHERSTONE

# Selling like hotcakes

Kodiak Cakes offers whole-grain goodness and more

BY MARK RAY

NECESSITY MAY be the mother of invention, but some mothers are pretty inventive in their own right. Take Penny Clark. Back in 1982, she sent her 8-year-old son, Joel, around the family's Utah neighborhood selling pancake mix out of a red wagon. This wasn't just any pancake mix, however. It was a version of an old family recipe that called for egg whites, baking soda and vinegar, as the instructions she stapled to each brown paper lunch sack explained.

Joel quickly sold his stock, but Penny decided she and her husband, Richard, weren't ready to run a business and raise five kids at the same time. The dream never died, however. A dozen years later, Joel's older brother, Jon, revisited the idea of launching a pancake business.

This time around, Jon envisioned a just-add-water version of Grandpa Wallace Christofferson's familiar recipe, a version he perfected after months of research and tinkering. In 1995, the brothers loaded up their car and began selling Kodiak Cakes Frontier Flapjack and Waffle Mix to shops

in ski towns like Park City, Utah; Sun Valley, Idaho; and Jackson, Wyoming. Two years later, Jon handed the reins to Joel, who is now CEO.

"It was slow going for many years, and sticking with it was incredibly tough," says Joel Clark. "It was hard to stay motivated, but one of the biggest reasons I stuck it out was because of the customer letters and emails that would arrive almost every day, telling us how much they loved Kodiak Cakes and thanking us for making a healthy product that tasted so good."

It took years before Clark could quit his day job, but business has been booming since Kodiak Cakes nabbed national distribution deals, including one with Costco in 2013. Much of the growth stems from a 2014 appearance on ABC's Shark Tank, where entrepreneurs pitch their ideas and seek venture capi-

tal. The sharks on television, unlike their aquatic counterparts, had quite a taste for pancakes. In fact, one shark offered \$500,000 for 50 percent of the business, an offer





#### OUR DIGITAL EDITIONS

Joel Clark tells the story behind Kodiak Cakes and the development of Power Cakes. (See page 10 for details.)

Clark and national sales director Cameron Smith turned down. (“I think you guys are smart,” said host Mark Cuban.)

Also fueling the company’s growth has been an increased interest in the value of whole grains. Kodiak Cakes doesn’t just substitute whole-wheat flour for the refined white variety. Instead, it uses 100 percent non-GMO (genetically modified organism) whole grains and infuses protein into its mixes. The results are apparent on the nutritional labels. For example, the company’s original mix contains more than four times the fiber and nearly twice the protein contained in mixes made by competing brands. Kodiak Cakes’ Butter-milk Power Cakes Flapjack and Waffle Mix—its best-selling product by far—boasts 14 grams of protein per serving, the same as a 2-ounce serving of beef.

Over time, the Kodiak Cakes product line has expanded to include muffin mixes, cookie mixes, frozen waffles, syrups and more. All align with the company’s mission to “inspire healthier eating and active lifestyles with great-tasting products for today’s frontier.”

What’s next for the company? “We’re looking for categories where there is a need for great-tasting whole-grain and high-protein products,” Clark says. “The forest is the limit when a Kodiak bear is on the loose. And it’s a big forest out there!” **C**

*Costco member Mark Ray is a freelance writer based in Louisville, Kentucky.*

#### COMPANY INFO

**COMPANY** Kodiak Cakes

**CEO** Joel Clark

**EMPLOYEES** 40

**HEADQUARTERS** Park City, Utah

**WEBSITE** [kodiakcakes.com](http://kodiakcakes.com)

#### ITEMS AT COSTCO

Power Cakes, Apricot Syrup, Raspberry Syrup, Marionberry Syrup, Mountain Berry Syrup, Northwest Berry Syrup, Super Fruit Syrup (selection varies by location)

#### QUOTE ABOUT COSTCO

“They treat their members with the utmost respect and always work to sell the highest-quality products at the best prices. It is easy for us to partner with Costco because we have similar values here at Kodiak Cakes. We put our consumers first, work hard to release only the best products and always strive to be awesome to work with.”—Joel Clark, CEO

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