

## Jack's Bean joins NJC's Club 1941

Written by Susie Schaefer

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This year marks the 10th anniversary for Jack's Bean Company with their current ownership, but there's more to the operation than just a decade of being "full of beans."

Back in 1932, Jack's Bean Company was first started in Fort Morgan. Since that time, it has been through several owners, seen numerous modifications, been rearranged and relocated. And, it has reached huge markets in this country and beyond. In fact, the "Red Beans and Rice" on the menu at the popular Popeye's Chicken restaurants in this nation features beans supplied by Jack's Bean Company right here in northeastern Colorado.

Jack's Bean Company was one of the very first businesses to step up and choose to purchase a year in support of Northeastern Junior College Foundation's fundraiser, Club 1941. They picked the year 2002 because that's when Jack's Bean Company was purchased from Con Agra.

When asked why they support NJC, chief operating officer and partner Steve Brown replied, "We are lucky to have a junior college in close proximity to where we live and do business. We recognize the value of having this." He and wife Cherrie have been supporters of the HOPE Scholarship and a corporate sponsor for the NJC Gala.

He knows students from Holyoke and Phillips County are among the many students in this area being helped by the HOPE Scholarship. Steve went on to explain that NJC offers "a good value, a good stepping stone for making the break to the big city," and expressed he felt it was important for the community to "preserve it (NJC) and make it available for future generations."

Steve said he feels the educational opportunity at NJC is undervalued for all that it offers locally. "NJC gives students a great education at a great value."

The Browns know something about value. They've spent the last 10 years perfecting the idea of adding undeniable value to Jack's Bean Company. The operation's name has a story of its own, and its history is vibrant and strong. It was named after the beloved fairytale "Jack and the Beanstalk." The original location of Jack's Bean Company was at 100 Main Street in Fort Morgan. This site had a bean elevator but doubled as a pet and feed store.

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Over the years, this successful company has had various owners. In 1974 the Klein family from Stockton, Calif. bought Jack's Bean Company from Damon McMann. It was the Kleins who moved the company from Fort Morgan to the current location in Holyoke in the mid-1980s.

In the fall of 1992, the Klein family sold the business to Con Agra, who then merged several locations. Jack's Bean Company was again sold in 2002 and purchased from Con Agra by a group of owners. It is now managed by Brown, who is part of this group.

This May marks the 10th anniversary for the company's current ownership and the 80th anniversary since the company's inception.

Steve has been with Jack's Bean Company since 1974 when the Klein family owned the business, and he has held several positions with the company over the years. The company has facilities in Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Arizona and Colorado. The Holyoke facility covers approximately 25 acres and includes three processing plants and multiple unloading facilities.



**Steve and Cherrie Brown of Jack's Bean Company are proud supporters of the Hope for Northeastern Colorado Scholarship program. They purchased the year 2002 in honor of the year they and partners purchased the Holyoke company from Con Agra.**

So one might ask, what exactly does Jack's Bean Company produce? Well, they produce a

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variety of beans for human consumption, meaning that the beans that are grown and processed by Jack's Bean Company are sold to companies for canning or dried goods.

Jack's Bean Company's annual bean selection depends on the season, market demand and agronomic advantages. The most common crops produced are light red kidney beans, pinto beans and yellow popcorn, which all come from irrigated fields. Interestingly enough, popcorn requires the same processing and storage as beans, and many of the same customers who buy beans also purchase popcorn.

New for this year are yellow peas, which is a dryland crop. Each of the crops are planted and harvested at a specific time of year and have a different gestation period or cycle of growth.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Klein family owned Jack's Bean Company, the company experienced tremendous growth and it became the biggest exporter from the United States to Mexico. Much of this growth was due to the growing agriculture business in the U.S. brought forth by irrigational development.

This has meant that the areas where Jack's is established have become major production locations for dry beans. In addition to shipping many beans south, Jack's is also one of the top three exporters of popcorn to Mexico City.

Jack's Bean Company has become a local leader in international commerce. And, it is interesting they are still one of the few companies to produce a product that is used for direct consumption by humans.

Most crops are harvested and then sent to be processed into other foods or animal feed, but Jack's Bean Company produces only beans and popcorn—both used for human consumption in their natural state. The company is proud to offer a product that is wholesome and healthy. Beans have fabulous nutrition value, and they are very good for the environment, according to the Browns.

No one can ever say that Jack's doesn't know beans. Each type of bean has a strong ethnic

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background and heritage. Kidney beans are used in Carribbean cooking, pinto beans are primarily for Mexican cuisine, and other beans are used by various cultures. The United States is one of the only countries that uses all types of beans for many different types of cuisines—a virtual “melting pot” of beans.

The Browns are extremely dedicated to Jack's Bean Company and to their community. They belong to Zion Lutheran Church and met while both were serving on the Holyoke City Council. They married 13 years ago and blended their families along with their lives. They still believe in the basics; God, family and work. Cherrie is the executive director of the Melissa Memorial Hospital Foundation and on the Board of Directors for the Community Resource Center.

Steve belongs to a number of professional organizations. He has held officer positions on the Colorado Dry Bean Administrative Committee and the U.S. Dry Bean Council, which deals with international market issues via a \$1.3 million budget. Steve also belongs to the U.S. Pea & Lentil Council, the Rocky Mountain Bean Dealer's Association and the U.S. Popcorn Institute.

Steve also understands community, for example, during Hurricane Katrina, when a customer's business was in danger of being shut down, Jack's Bean Company stepped in and produced artwork and emergency packaging for them to keep them afloat (literally) and to help out a good customer.

Jack's Bean Company, for doing all that it does for others, is indeed a wonderful corporate citizen here in this corner of Colorado and a great example of just why it's okay to be “full of beans.”

For more information on Club 1941 and the HOPE Scholarship program, contact NJC Foundation executive director Cindy Johnson at 970-521-6603.

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