

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

David Little, center, president of Jersey Canna, with vice president/sales & marketing Dan Silver, left; and sales manager Ric Flattes, right.



Let Them Eat Chocolate

Fairfield-based chocolate maker is among the first to offer Jersey-made, cannabis-infused confections. *By Deborah P. Carter*

More chocolate changes hands in February than any other month, and this year, chocolate maker David Little is adding a twist to the mix. Little's new company, Jersey Canna, is among the Garden State's first manufacturers of cannabis-infused chocolate edibles and, at press time, they were in the final stages before distribution could begin.

In November 2020, when the Garden State gave the nod for recreational-use dispensaries to join the medicinal retailers that had been open since 2012, a rush of soon-to-be sellers lined up. But as Little explains, getting into the cannabis business in this state takes a lot more than filling out a single form. "We are already approved to manufacture, now we are waiting for recipe approval," he says.

"Every state is its own island in cannabis," says Little, Jersey Canna's president, who has educated himself on marijuana laws in the Garden State and beyond. To be a state-authorized New Jersey-licensed edible maker, the marijuana must be grown, extracted, processed and sold in the state. According to Little, Jersey Canna will be the

first all-Jersey operation. "Made by all Jersey people," he notes, adding that there will even be Jersey-inspired flavors like blueberry.

While Jersey-made edibles are a new introduction to dispensaries in this state, Little's Jersey Canna brings a wealth of experience to the fore.

"Being an entrepreneur takes guts and money," Little says. A former accountant, when he left the corporate world, he says, he wasn't sure where he would land as an entrepreneur. But after undergrad at Emory University (where Little says he learned discipline, drive, and how to work 24 hours a day), grad school at Tulane University, and many years in the corporate world, he knew he'd figure it out. His first foray into business was a corporate-gifting venture that included chocolate items.

Little's willingness to follow his instincts served him well, and before long, he was creating corporate incentive and loyalty gifts for big-name companies like Starbucks, Ghirardelli and Gevalia. "Chocolate is great because it is sharable," Little says. At first, he adds, "we were basically taking existing retail products and repackaging them for the business-to-business market. At some point,

we just started making our own." Little sources Belgian chocolate as the base for his blends.

Once Christian Dior came calling for a chocolate product, Little pulled in chefs for the chocolate making, a move that eventually led to a handful of chocolate-themed business offshoots, including Edible Art, classic paintings with chocolate as the canvas; Chocolate Text, chunky chocolate letters to spell whatever a client wants; and, finally, Immunity Goodness—chocolates, that Little, with his team of food techs, scientists and pharmacists, cook up with infusions of vitamins, herbs and minerals to serve as sleep aids, boost immunity, ease nausea, and even soothe tired eyes.

Nutraceuticals—the addition of nutritional supplements, such as vitamins, minerals, herbs, botanicals and CBD (a non-psychoactive element of the cannabis plant) into foods, tinctures, lozenges and beverages—have exploded in recent

years and the experience Little and his team's had infusing chocolate positioned them perfectly to capitalize on the trend when it expanded to cannabis.

"Our goal is to use our knowledge to create products that help people with the maladies of their daily lives, and not just to cash in on the cannabis boom," Little says, pointing out that he and his team members are mostly over 60 and "not even pot users," but they have a wellspring of varied business experience and recognize the breadth of the cannabis industry.

Little—who wears nearly every hat in the company—has a team of fewer than 10 employees, including a chocolate chef, a cannabis expert and back-of-house employees, plus a long, varied list of consultants, from scientists and lawyers to compounding pharmacists. "Experience is our strength," says Little. "The cannabis business has two kinds of people: experts in food processing and people who grew up in the cannabis world. We have both. Plus, we have 30 years' experience with food safety and recipe formulation."

He explains, "Our focus is on functional THC (the psychoactive element in cannabis). Our main thrust is to use nutraceuticals to get the maximum benefits out of cannabinoids to help people sleep, to energize them, and to help with anxiety. Some of our blends may have less than the standard level of THC for a psychoactive high, but instead will have formulations that help other issues." Little's health-supporting candies are designed to be preventative for particular ailments, while being less expensive and more available than pharmaceuticals.

"All edibles are not created equally," he cautions. "Smoking weed is instantaneous, a cheap way to deliver THC, and smoking burns off some of the impurities. It is not as risky as eating an edible. Chocolate makes the THC more bioavailable because edibles travel to your stomach and then the liver before entering the brain and bloodstream. You see edibles everywhere, but gas-station and convenience-store products aren't likely state approved. There's a big knockoff market, and you take some risk buying them." By comparison, Little's chocolates are individually dosed candies that make it easy to control your intake.

"Our product is the difference between buying bread at the bakery and buying bread at the supermarket," says Little. 🍪

QUICK BITES



NORTH

SIX POINTS PUB

➤ Bloomfield

STYLE A modern American pub-grub aesthetic, with wood-paneled booths, a bar to watch sports, and stylish mugshots of celebrities lining the walls.

THE SCOOP Formerly the location of a Payless shoe store, Six Points opened in 2020 after the footwear company went out of business.

THE MENU Start off with some classic shareables, such as the nachos, made with homemade tortilla chips and topped with cheese sauce, homemade guacamole, chipotle mayo and sour cream. The flatbreads, among them chicken bacon ranch and Hawaiian, are also worth a try. Burgers are a must. Order the Forager—a half-pound burger dressed with barbecue sauce, sautéed mushrooms, onions and Swiss cheese, served on a kaiser roll bun; add a side of scrumptious truffle fries. There are plenty of vegetarian options, too, including a tasty Greek salad. For dessert, dig into the Man Pie, a crowd favorite, made with dark chocolate, caramel, pecan and a bit of Jack Daniels.

HEADS UP Six Points offers fun weekly trivia and karaoke nights, great for group activities. —Connor Carlin

574 Bloomfield Avenue
973-337-5401
sixpointspub.com

Lunch and dinner, daily
PRICE \$\$



CENTRAL

TACO N' LIME

➤ Marlboro

STYLE Vibrant and festive, this new eatery has good-mood vibes throughout. Bright, Mexican-inspired wall murals add pizzazz along the booth and table spaces. A walk-up ordering counter makes eating in no-fuss.

THE SCOOP Open since September 2023, this Mexican kitchen is earning a great fan base for its mix of comfort foods and classics.

THE MENU Start with the Mexican street corn and empanadas. The corn, served on the cob, is grilled and deliciously adorned with mayo, queso fresco, lime, chili powder, Cojita cheese and cilantro. Empanadas are available with chicken tinga, chorizo or beef fillings, and are both authentic and addictive. Tacos are a must, and there's a large variety—if you must pick one, go with the street taco mix-and-match combo. If you want to try something a bit unexpected, order the Jamaican burrito, generously filled with jerk chicken, sweet plantains, avocado, Chihuahua cheese, coconut drizzle, rice and beans. Birria is another notable option, as are any of the quesadillas and fajitas. Burgers are eclectic and definitely made for the hungry. If you have an appetite left, end your meal with churros or a cheesecake chimichanga.

HEADS UP: Keep an eye out for the taco-of-the-month special. —Gina Glazier

2 Ryan Road
732-409-6100
taconlime.com

Lunch and dinner, daily
PRICE \$



SOUTH

TACOS EL TIO

➤ Medford

STYLE A casual yet vibrant indoor/outdoor eatery serving Mexican-street-fair-inspired food.

THE SCOOP Tacos El Tio celebrated its fifth anniversary this past year. A second location is 40 miles south, in Egg Harbor Township.

THE MENU Chimichangas are a must. Pan fried, covered with cheese, and served with crema and a side of guacamole—which is an app you should not skip—they can be filled with veggies, chicken, steak or shrimp. Tacos with soft corn or flour tortillas come three per order, with options like al pastor, mahi mahi, or veggie picadillo for a great vegetarian option. A variety of elevated entrées also make the menu, including the signature pollo ranchero: a chicken breast stuffed with poblano peppers and chorizo. If you're up for a sweet bite, even after all the rounds of chips and salsa, tres leches, flan and a cheesecake churrito are available.

HEADS UP Get a house margarita; they're on tap. —Emily Melvin

200 Tuckerton Road
856-334-8026
tacoseltio.com

Lunch and dinner, daily
PRICE \$\$

PRICES (most entrées) \$ under \$15 \$\$ \$15-\$25 \$\$\$ over \$25