Food Innovation Center Client, Steve’s Club, Debuts New Products at 2010 CrossFit Games in Los Angeles

Bridgeton, NJ. Steve’s Club, a Camden, NJ-based non-profit organization and marketer of a specialty line of products for the “paleo” diet, is one of the newest clients at the Rutgers Food Innovation Center (FIC) in Bridgeton, NJ. Steve’s Club produces Paleokits snack packs at the Center, a blend of free-range beef jerky, raw nuts and dried berries that are sold via the internet and to CrossFit fitness and conditioning programs across the country. The proceeds from Steve’s Club support efforts to improve the lives of youth in Camden through fitness and community.

On July 14, company founder Steve Liberati and four of his club’s members boarded a plane bound for Los Angeles, CA, and the 2010 CrossFit Games, a three-day competition where the world’s top athletes compete in a variety of physical competitions. Steve’s Club displayed its existing products in a vendor booth and premiered its brand-new Paleo Stix, an organic, grass-fed beef stick.

“The line was a steady twenty people deep all weekend long,” said Liberati. “We sold each and every piece of food we brought with us.”

A remarkable success story for a company only a few years old, and a remarkable personal story for Liberati. While working as an exterminator in the Camden area, Liberati met so many young people who were struggling to escape the poverty, obesity, drugs and neglect that had become their norm. In May 2007, he decided to round up some weight-lifting equipment and, using the CrossFit training program, do something to help. He started with only 3 kids and a small, rented space and within a month, Steve’s Club, as it came to be known, had 20 local kids coming in to lift and learn about the program.

“A remarkable success story for a company only a few years old, and a remarkable personal story for Liberati. While working as an exterminator in the Camden area, Liberati met so many young people who were struggling to escape the poverty, obesity, drugs and neglect that had become their norm. In May 2007, he decided to round up some weight-lifting equipment and, using the CrossFit training program, do something to help. He started with only 3 kids and a small, rented space and within a month, Steve’s Club, as it came to be known, had 20 local kids coming in to lift and learn about the program.

“Steve’s Club is a Disney World … a place where dreams are made and happy times are had; where they can share stories, experiences, ideas, and goals with their friends; where a kid can be a hero for a day and finish a workout that adults do; where they can learn new skills, new movements and a new way to look at health and fitness; where everyone comes out on top and walks about feeling accomplished and proud; where they can run around outside without having to worry about stray bullets or stepping on dirty needles or crack pipes; where they can confide in someone who respects and cares about them, someone who is willing to offer advice whether it is fitness related (or) about nutrition, school or life,” says Liberati.

A large part of Steve’s concerns center on the average diet of his club members. As Liberati searched for a healthy, portable food alternative and creative ways to support his non-profit program, Paleokits were born. Paleokits, which follow the “Paleo” or “Cave Man” diet, consists of jerky, macadamias, almonds, pecans and dried fruits.
Paleokits were developed as not only a way to support the work of Steve’s Club, but also as an opportunity to provide club members with a way to exercise and develop their minds along with their bodies. The venture also provides income for employees, as Steve’s Club employs its members to produce the entire product line. All of the youth working under supervision in the Rutgers Food Innovation Center’s production facility received food safety and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) training, courtesy of the Center. “In addition to making some extra money and gaining job experience, they also learn the various steps that an idea goes through on its way to becoming a product and all of the different aspects involved in the selling and marketing process,” added Liberati.

Liberati came to the Rutgers FIC in May 2010 looking for business assistance and a place to produce his product. The Center assisted with product and process development, ingredient sourcing, quality assurance, and nutritional labeling. Food Safety Training was also provided to all members of Steve’s Club who would be working on the production floor. The Food Innovation Center also developed the USDA-required HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) plan for the product, and provided an FDA and USDA inspected site for final assembly of the Paleokits.

Going forward, the FIC is developing a forecasting model to help Liberati better match his inventory to demand. The center is also assisting as he works to flesh out possible line extensions and a branding strategy to expand into national distribution.

“Working with the Food Innovation Center has really allowed me to take my business to the next level,” said Liberati. “Their expertise has been absolutely invaluable.”

Paleokits, Paleokrunch Cereal and Paleokrunch Bars are available for purchase on the Steve’s Club website http://www.stevesoriginal.com/. Paleo Stix will also be available on the site soon.

Find out more about Steve’s Club and its work to help Camden youth, and how to donate to the organization or sponsor an athlete at http://stevesclub.org.

###

**About Rutgers Food Innovation Center**
The Rutgers Food Innovation Center is a unique business incubation and economic development accelerator program that provides business and technology expertise to small and mid-sized food and agribusinesses in New Jersey, and utilizes its outreach capacity to reach the food industry throughout the nation. Clients include farmers and cooperatives, startup food companies, existing small and mid-sized food establishments and retail and foodservice markets. The center’s new 23,000-sq.-ft. food incubator facility enables the marketing, development and distribution of new products for the center’s clients, and the evaluation of new technologies and processes. FIC is a research and extension center of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. Further information can be found at [www.foodinnovation.rutgers.edu](http://www.foodinnovation.rutgers.edu)