

DELICIOUS SUCCESS

SIBLINGS PHUONG AND VIET LE INTRODUCE ONO TEA

Approximately 28 years ago, a Vietnamese family immigrated to the United States in pursuit of the American dream. To reach their goal, they opened an alteration and dry cleaning store, and the children watched their parents' work ethic and success. As with most parents, they wanted a "stable profession" for their children – so Viet Le, 25, and his sister Phuong Le, 30, of ONO Tea chose to follow in their parents' footsteps and become successful entrepreneurs.

ONO, meaning delicious in Hawaii, started with Phuong's pursuit of a healthier alternative to coffee. "My mom told me to purchase loose leaf tea. Along with drinking (the) tea, I used my culinary skills and started blending papaya and mango," says the CEO and president. "Then I went to the bookstore and saw a magazine that mentioned the World Tea Expo taking place in Atlanta in June of 2007. I called my brother, Viet, and said, 'We have to do this.' With a little convincing, we went."

After returning home, Viet and Phuong started working on their company immediately. In November 2007, ONO Tea launched its first Web site, offering everything from Geisha Green and Berry Dazzle to Masala Chai and Blooming Goddess teas.

Not your average tea company, the Les take pride in setting themselves apart due to their lifestyle collections and branding. The brainchild behind this is Vice President and COO Viet. "Anything you see visual is on me," he says proudly. In an effort to stay original, Viet also came up with the lifestyle collections. "We developed different collections of tea where customers can identify themselves with a certain collection of ours and become a part of ONO themselves," he explains.


Phuong adds, "We have a tea for golfers called Lifetime. If you are an athlete, there is a tea for you. We even have a kids' collection. We also developed our own teaware."

ONO also takes pride in being an organic company. Viet says,



"That sets us apart – we actively search for organic tea around the world. With everyone trying to live a healthier lifestyle, tea is a great drink, and we want to keep it healthy."

The transition of working with family has been very smooth. Viet and Phuong say they wouldn't have it any other way. "We are really family oriented, and it is nice to work together because we know each other so well," Viet says. Their sister, who is in Hawaii, will soon be joining the company as a managing partner. With a family business that is growing tremendously, the Les are also happy to support the Michigan economy.

ONO Tea's abundance of success is exciting for the brother and sister. As they continue to grow, they would love to see their own chain of trendy tea shops and make ONO a household name. Phuong says, "We want to make tea something that you will drink everyday, not just something you drink when you are sick."  – Yvette Stines

iloveono.com