

Peas of Mind brings peace of mind to busy parents

BY DANEK S. KAUS

About seven or eight years ago, when Peas of Mind CEO **Jill Litwin** was enduring the Vermont winters, she worked with a young mother who was expecting her second child.

"It was a rough pregnancy," Litwin said. "The last thing she wanted to do was go to the grocery store, especially in the dead of winter. So she stocked up on canned foods but she felt guilty because she had no time or energy."

Litwin offered to cook for the woman's son. The grateful mother agreed and she and her son visited at dinner times. Wanting to do her best for the child, Litwin began to study nutrition for children in order to learn how to create healthy meals.

She decided to create all-in-one meals, such as soufflés and casseroles that were nutritionally balanced, tasty and easy to heat up and serve.

Soon word spread and other mothers requested that Litwin cook for them also.

She wondered why her meals were so popular so she studied the frozen food sections of the local grocery stores. "There was nothing healthy for that age group that was easy to make," Litwin said. "There were things that parents could take home and just heat up, but nothing healthy."

Litwin realized that there was a market for her creations.

"This business found me," she said. "It was not the other way around. Something inside told me that this was what I was meant to do."

Because she had no real ties to Vermont, she researched on the best place to launch her business. She determined that the San Francisco Bay Area would be ideal, because California is the source of so much organic food and the parents are health conscious, according to Litwin.

Once the decision was made, she put her belongings in storage and drove to San Francisco, working on her business plan along the way. She arrived on Dec. 31, 2004, ready to launch a new year and a new life.

Growing her business and learning how to manage it has been a learning experience. At first, she cooked everything herself in a commercial kitchen. Once she got a handle on production, she hired someone to do that. Today, her company outsources to manufacturers.

"The company is growing at a wonderful pace I am comfortable with," Litwin said.

Her favorite part of the business is the food itself. Her first and still primary product is called the Puffet, a frozen hand-



Jill Litwin

held treat small enough for toddler hands and mouths, but big enough to contain a balanced meal that can be prepared in a couple of minutes. Puffets come in six varieties, all made with organic ingredients.

"The product is relevant and there is a need for it. We want to offer kids and parents something that is a healthy alternative to the other things in the marketplace," Litwin said.

She also likes wheeling and dealing. "I really love negotiating and creating new accounts. I love going to trade shows. And I love going into grocery stores and feeding [Puffets] to the customers," Litwin said.

Peas of Mind's products are in stores in most of the nation, with the exclusion of the northeast. This month (January) they will enter that market, the place where it all began.

In addition to garnering thumb's ups from sticky little hands, Litwin's products are getting industry attention. Puffets have been named as one of the top products of 2008 by *Food Processing* magazine.

Not content to rest on her organic veggies and rice, Litwin plans to continue to grow the company and expand the product line.

Although she has brought good nutrition and enjoyment to many children, and relief to busy parents, Litwin has no children of her own. "This company is my child," she said. **31**