Denim is usually associated with jeans and jackets, but some Oklahomans are enjoying a much tastier denim product. Denim’s Restaurant, established in 1989 and located in Marietta, Okla., has officially entered the candy business.

Gene Shepard and his wife, Edel, own the restaurant with their daughter, Sharon Lemons, and her husband, Mike.

Aside from providing delicious meals, 10 years ago the restaurant also started making candy and selling it to their patrons.

Gene Shepard’s recipes, the most popular candies were the pecan pralines and peanut patties. Demand for the candies grew, and soon customers began asking for shipments.

As the call for pecan pralines and peanut patties increased, the restaurant requested assistance from the Food & Agricultural Products Center located on the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater, Okla.

The FAPC conducted an analysis of the candy ingredients and the nutritional value and assisted with marketing the candies.

“The FAPC took us to convenient store conventions, where it received a great response,” Gene Shepard said.

Even after wholesale distribution of the candies finally began at the end of February, the FAPC continues to be involved.

“The FAPC still assists with production issues and marketing,” Mike Lemons said.

Jim Brooks, FAPC marketing specialist, recognizes the demand for Denim’s candies.

“Denim’s makes the traditional ‘old fashioned’ style of peanut patty with more peanuts than their competition, and to the consumers who enjoy that type of candy, it’s very apparent when they pick it up and compare it side by side with the other brands,” Brooks said.

Denim’s sees the importance of having Made in Oklahoma products and uses local pecans in their pralines.

“They make a pecan praline that is absolutely delicious and hard to find today in the candy category in this market,” Brooks said.

“Although the pecan praline is a little more expensive because of the cost of the pecans, it will still be a big seller for Denim’s.”

The candies continue to be produced in the restaurant in Marietta, Okla. Several large and small

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I recently reviewed several publications of the International Food Information Council. The message of these reports coincided closely with other very recent marketing studies on current and future trends and demands of consumers. Consumers are becoming more interested in foods that have a positive impact on their health, even in light of the holiday season and the food festivities that we all enjoy.

When consumers were asked to rank health issues of importance to them, the second item, just behind cardiovascular disease, was obesity. These consumers highlighted their desire to purchase foods that helped them stay focused on body weight and condition. The foods highlighted in the study included fruit and vegetables, milk, fish and seafood, foods with high amounts of fiber, cruciferous vegetables, whole grains, garlic and herbs and green tea.

The results of that consumer study indicated the awareness of consumers of the role of diet on their wellbeing and showed consumers are aware of specific foods and their particular health compounds. An example was foods, such as tomatoes and watermelons, offering a natural source of lycopene used by the body for vision and prostate health.

Other recent market information has shown consumers to be very interested in natural or organic products and food products with minimum processing. The Organic Trade Association has published information showing an average of a 20 percent growth rate in this multibillion dollar organic foods market, with 14 percent of the average American household budget devoted to purchases of organic foods.

What use is this information to food processors in Oklahoma? It is a confirmation that consumers know what they want and they want foods that fit their expectations of a health-beneficial diet. The opportunity for the Oklahoma processor is to understand where your products best fit consumer demands and actively market those products to those consumers.

The Food & Agricultural Products Center has scientists and technologists to help you get the best from your products and marketing specialists to assist you in best placement of your products in the market. Call (405) 744-6762 or e-mail erin.joy.early@okstate.edu to access the support of the FAPC.

I extend Holiday Wishes to you from the FAPC. Let’s expect a great New Year.

Dr. J. Roy Escoubas
FAPC Director

The FAPC Industry Advisory Committee met on Nov. 10 at the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, located in Oklahoma City, to discuss issues affecting the FAPC and the food and agricultural industries.

J. Roy Escoubas, FAPC director met with the committee and communicated about the activities taking place at the FAPC. The committee also discussed planning and expectations for the FAPC facilities, as well as the competencies and strengths of the center.

During the meeting, Secretary of Commerce Kathy Taylor stopped by to meet the committee members and to talk about activities happening at the Department of Commerce.

This meeting was the first one for new members: Jill Stichler, Redland Juice Co.; David Howard, Unitherm Food Systems; and John Williams, Chef Requested Foods. The meeting allowed the new committee members to meet and visit with the other committee members.
Nelson receives service award

Jake Nelson, FAPC meat processing manager, received a Distinguished Service Award by OSU’s Staff Advisory Council. Nelson was just one of eight OSU staff who were recognized with the Distinguished Staff Award.

The award recognized individuals for going above and beyond their normal job duties.

Nelson received the award during the Annual OSU Staff Appreciation Day held recently. The event, sponsored by the OSU Staff Advisory Council, is an awards and recognition program for the approximately 4,000 members of OSU staff.

Nelson received the honor for his efforts in bringing the FAPC federally inspected harvest and processing plant up to operational status, as well as his commitment to in-house research support and co-teaching Animal Science labs and classes.

Young receives ASQ certification

Jason Young, FAPC quality management specialist, was named a Certified Quality Manager by the American Society for Quality.

Young completed the requirements to be named a Certified Quality Manager and reached a significant level of professional recognition in quality principles and practices.

A Certified Quality Manager is a professional who understands quality standards and concepts, can execute organizational assessments and sustain customer focus and satisfaction.

The American Society for Quality is the world’s leading authority on quality. The professional association advances learning, quality improvement and knowledge exchange to improve business results and to create better workplaces and communities worldwide.

FAPC students receive scholarships

Two FAPC students were awarded scholarships from the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board.

Mandy Stricklin and Stephanie Marak each received a $1,500 scholarship for the 2005-2006 academic year. Both work in the FAPC food microbiology laboratory under Stanley E. Gilliland, FAPC food microbiologist.

Gilliland presented the awards to these students at an animal science faculty and staff meeting.

“Recipients of these scholarships are selected from students across the United States,” Gilliland said. “This speaks well of the caliber of these young ladies.”

Each year, the NDPRB awards individual scholarships to up to 19 sophomore, junior and/or senior undergraduate students who are enrolled in programs that emphasize dairy.

Mandy Stricklin (top) and Stephanie Marak (bottom) perform duties in one of the FAPC Microbiology Laboratories.

FAPC to hold Trans Free Fat Workshop

The FAPC is offering a Trans Free Fat Workshop on Jan. 17, 2006, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the center. Participants will learn how food manufacturers can comply with FDA regulations. To register for the workshop, call (405) 744-6071 or e-mail jerri.beth.strickland@okstate.edu or register online at www.fapc.biz/pages/transfreefat. Registration fee is $100 and the deadline to register is Jan. 6, 2006.

Research Symposium slated for Feb. 22

The FAPC and the Institute of Food Technologists-Oklahoma Section are hosting a research symposium Feb. 22, 2006, at the center. The keynote speaker for this year’s event will be John Park, director of the Texas Center for Cooperative Development. The title of his presentation is “Consumer Paradox: Understanding America’s Health-Conscious Obese.” Visit www.fapc.biz/pages/researchsymposium for more information.

Marketing and Financial Workshops to be held

The FAPC will be hosting a “Real World” Marketing Workshop and Financial Management Workshop during Spring 2006. These interactive workshops will help participants address business issues through marketing and financial management assistance. More details will be available at www.fapc.biz when they become available.

Food Facts
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Managing Editor: Mandy Gross
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distributors are sending the candies to statewide locations in Oklahoma. Texas has also started receiving shipments, and Kansas is being considered a possibility in the near future.

The owners are enjoying this new aspect of Denim’s restaurant.

“It’s a lot of work, but a lot of fun, too,” Gene Shepard said.

Grocery wholesaler holds groundbreaking

Associated Wholesale Grocers is building a new distribution center in Oklahoma City, and the organization recently held a groundbreaking to begin the construction. This new 800,000-square-foot facility is expected to be completed in 2007 and will employ more than 500 people.

AWG was founded in 1924 and is the nation’s second largest retailer-owned grocery wholesaler in the United States serving more than 1,500 stores in a 21-state distribution area.

The current Oklahoma City distribution center supplies more than 200 independent retailers across a four-state area. The company supplies a variety of products, such as standard and specialty grocer items, health and beauty care, fresh produce, meat, bakery and deli items.