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THE TUNA CRACKA' STACKA' APPETIZER AT ELLA'S FOLK ART CAFE. - JULIE BUSCH

features



DERMAZONE PRESIDENT DEBORAH DUFFEY. - JULIE BUSCH

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Skincare: Peeling Back The Layers At Dermazone In St. Petersburg

BY CHRIS KUHN
TUESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2010

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Tucked away in St. Petersburg's industrial district, Dermazone Solutions has been quietly and prolifically formulating and producing pharmaceutical grade skincare and beauty products for more than 10 years. Equipped with an FDA-registered manufacturing facility and its own patented and trademarked nanotechnology Lyphazome®, the life science company also has spawned three distinct divisions: Celazome® Clinical Skin Care, Kara Vita and DermaCM.

In July, Dermazone President Deborah Duffey launched the company's fourth line, [Hyssop Health](#), being marketed as an all-natural remedy for fighting bacteria and viruses that contribute to common ailments such as acne, earaches and sore throats. The announcement follows two years of intensive research and product testing, something Duffey is quite accustomed to in her dual role as chief product officer. She points out that religious scholars may recognize the newly released solution offered in both oral and topical applications as Hyssop, referenced within Biblical scripture and made primarily from a Mediterranean wild oregano oil (origanum vulgare).

"We felt compelled to do this product and had so many years of field data, testimonials and in vitro research that we knew we could help more people," says Dermazone's chief executive.

Path To St. Pete

It has been a steady road of growth and innovation for Dermazone Solutions, and Duffey has been there from the beginning with the



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acquisition of a public company turned private, Largo-based Fountain Pharmaceuticals, founded by Michael Fountain, original inventor of Dermazone's trademarked nanotechnology platform. Armed with a solid background in data analysis and feasibility studies, Duffey came on board in 1996 to help the company's CEO and board of directors carve out next steps, immersing herself in the chemistry and preparing the due diligence and product design.

The company's first division [Celazome](#) launched in 1999, releasing more than 30 skin care products into the professional marketplace, aimed primarily at medical professionals focused on skin care, repair and treatment, including dermatologists, burn centers, plastic surgeons and estheticians. The company first made its mark with revolutionary waterproof and moisturizing sunscreens, still one of the company's bestsellers. Within a few years, the parent company officially took on the Dermazone Solutions name and in 2003, launched its second division [Kara Vita](#), this time appealing to the consumer marketplace through direct selling.

Kara Vita's original products were developed in 1989 for use with burn patients and only available in doctors' offices at the time, but have gone on to become a major component of the brand's anti-aging pharmaceutical-grade skin care series. The line now features more than 40 products using Dermazone's penetrating, time-released Lyphazome technology and sold by over 1,400 consultants nationwide.

Denise Walthers is executive VP of sales for Kara Vita with more than 20 years in skin care.

"We have such unique products and such strong customer loyalty, with less than a 0.05% product return in our market," she says. "Once customers experience our brand, they don't switch, because it works."

By 2005, Dermazone Solutions was spread across multiple locations including Orlando and Clearwater, and Duffey was determined to find a large contract manufacturing facility for the organization to expand its contract manufacturing operation including private labeling, fulfillment and packaging for other pharmaceutical and cosmeceutical companies. She hoped to find a location where all of the divisions including this new contract manufacturing arm, the future [DermaCM](#), could reside under one roof. By late summer 2006, all of Dermazone had moved into its current St. Pete location, 2440 30th Ave. N.

A Woman's Touch

Throughout Dermazone's steady growth, Duffey says the company has never lost sight of its main principals of innovation and technology.

"Everything begins in the laboratory and before anything leaves the door, it all goes back into the laboratory for final testing," she says. "We've been able to remain small in size with 35 people, and make an effort to grow with our needs, enabling people to grow from within vertically."

The company also has made every effort to minimize waste and inefficiency by using recycled, consumable filler in all shipping and implementing energy-efficient A/C handlers and lightbulbs throughout its 5,000-square-foot facility.

"We try to be good corporate citizens and do as much as we possibly can to stay current on packaging trends," she says.

In addition to its technological roots, Duffey says the corporation's predominantly woman-led operation has provided strong leadership and a supportive foundation for employees. She points to Kara Vita founder Karalyn Schuchert as a driving force for the brand's success in connecting with its predominantly female audience, both in the marketplace and sales force.

"Karalyn has always had an unwavering belief in the technology, the mission and the vision that we want to bring to many more women to inspire them," Duffey says.

Walthers agrees and says the company's women-centric focus was one of the factors that attracted her to Kara Vita. "I think women like to do business with other women, and we'll choose to do business with women every chance we get," she says. "It's an organization that's very pro-women, when it comes to women moving up in business, and I like that about it – working with women and empowering them to have success."

What's Next?

Duffey says Dermazone plans a few additional hires during the remaining half of the year, including staff support for the new Hyssop Health brand. As the pharmaceutical and manufacturing side of the business grows, she expects to hire additional employees in this area and mentions future plans to explore the veterinary marketplace, as well.

The parent company recently ventured out into the social media universe to create a presence at Twitter and Facebook for the Celazome and KaraVita brands and conduct the company's first formal product launch via digital marketing for the Hyssop unveiling, including its own [YouTube channel](#).

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"Every company has a story to tell. I think ours is particularly unique that we are a woman-founded, woman-run and woman-managed company, considering that we are in the manufacturing environment," says Duffey. "We truly are a unique evolution."

Chris Kuhn is a freelance writer who lives and works in the 'burbs of Tampa with her husband and her assistant, a 12-year-old dachshund-Chihuahua. Comments? Contact [83 Degrees](#).

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