

SUCCESS STORY

FARGO/SOUTHEAST 2023



UNCLE CHARLIE'S GOURMET SNACKS

FARGO - Uncle Charlie's Gourmet Snacks began as a dream in the mind of Clayton Cottman, a passionate cook with a deep love for creating unique snack experiences.

In 2018, Clayton took the bold step of starting his own business, a journey that would take two long years to materialize. Despite the challenges he faced along the way, Clayton never wavered in his commitment to his dream. In 2020, Uncle Charlie's Gourmet Snacks entered the market, marking a significant milestone for Clayton.

"The business specializes in revamping nostalgic confectionery snacks using high-quality ingredients and artisanal flavors," says Clayton. "It's very exciting to turn my aspirations into a tangible reality each day!" For Clayton, one of his favorite aspects of being a business owner is the sense of fulfillment he experiences daily. "Witnessing the progress of my business unfolding before my eyes is an indescribable feeling of accomplishment."

Uncle Charlie's Gourmet Snacks serves as an homage to Clayton's

Great Uncle, Dr. Charles Carter, Ph.D., a WWII front-line infantry medic. Following the war, Dr. Carter became one of the first African American clinical psychologists in U.S. history. His great uncle's legacy of resilience and determination lives on through Clayton's entrepreneurial journey.

Clayton found the North Dakota Small Business Development Centers (ND SBDC) while searching online for local small business resources. Though unsure of what to expect, Clayton was very excited to receive comprehensive support from the ND SBDC.





Fargo/SE Center Director Paul Smith assisted Clayton in developing a professional “lender-ready” business plan and detailed financial projections, and helped him prepare critical loan documents for funding opportunities.

One of the most significant hurdles Clayton faced was securing financing for his early-stage business. Building strong relationships with financial institutions, banks, investors, and lenders proved to be a daunting challenge. However, Clayton’s determination and resilience propelled him forward.

With the support and guidance of the ND SBDC, Clayton successfully secured funding through the GFM EDC Growth Initiative Fund and the North Dakota Development Fund. The expertise of the SBDC in business planning and financial analysis proved to be invaluable.

“The funds received through the EDC and ND Development Fund were instrumental in the growth of Uncle Charlie’s Gourmet Snacks,” says Clayton. “No entrepreneur can succeed in isolation. I’m so glad that I used the guidance, assistance, and connections of the ND SBDC.”

Uncle Charlie’s Gourmet Snacks has grown substantially since its inception. The products are now available in over 250 regional retail locations, including major grocery stores, popular convenience stores, and specialty store chains such as Scheel’s. This expansion has allowed Clayton to reach a wider audience and connect with customers who appreciate the unique flavors and quality of his snacks.

The community has

played a vital role in supporting Clayton’s business by purchasing his products and introducing Clayton to numerous local resources and organizations dedicated to helping small businesses in North Dakota grow.

Clayton attributes his company’s success to his unwavering fortitude and an unbounded belief in what is possible. His childlike innocence in approaching the realm of possibilities has been a driving force.

“Believe in yourself, fellow entrepreneurs, for you possess far more knowledge than you realize. Trust in your abilities, and you will achieve greatness,” advises Clayton to other aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners.

For Clayton Cottman, Uncle Charlie’s Gourmet Snacks is not just a business; it’s a tribute to the enduring belief that dreams can become reality if someone is willing to learn, work hard and never give up hope.



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