

Mark Galloway – Blacksmith Coffee 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Bali. Brazil. Guatemala. Himalayan highlands. Kenya. Antigua. What do these diverse regions of the world have in common? The answer is, they all serve as sources of coffee for a remarkable coffee roasting business located in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about The Old Grind, a coffee shop located in Lindsborg. In coming months, The Old Grind will be joining with an amazing coffee roastery which is also located in Lindsborg and is named Blacksmith Coffee Roastery.

Mark Galloway is the founder of Blacksmith Coffee Roastery. Mark grew up in Colorado. His father loved to drink coffee. "I learned how to roast coffee and even worked for Starbucks for a while," Mark said.

Mark met and married a young Kansas woman who had gone to Bethany College in Lindsborg. "We were looking for a more authentic lifestyle," Mark said. They moved to Lindsborg where his wife took a teaching position.

Mark was looking for a place to start an artisan, coffee roasting business. In downtown Lindsborg, he found a historic blacksmith shop which was being restored and available for rent. In 2008, the Blacksmith Coffee Roastery opened its doors.

"We wanted to bring great coffee to rural Kansas," Mark said. The old brick building still has the blacksmith name painted in large letters on the outside. The brick forge still stands inside. A sliding rail still hangs on the wall where doors opened so wagons could be pulled in, and there are iron rings on the wall where horses were tied.

Also inside is a modern, coffee bean dual-fuel micro-roaster which utilizes both propane and electricity to roast coffee. The roastery has commercial coffee grinders, a bag weigh-and-fill machine and bag sealers. Rooftop solar panels provide seventy percent of the building's energy needs.

The wonderful aroma of coffee immediately wafts to anyone who enters. This is not your everyday coffee. "We specialize in the high end, the top one percent of coffees," Mark said. "We use the finest Arabica beans, which only grow at high altitudes and result in the richest, most dynamic flavors."

Blacksmith Coffee is also very selective about its sources of coffee beans. "Our coffee is the best of the best," Mark said. "We source from small, independent growers who produce it ethically, both in terms of environmental sustainability and how laborers are compensated and treated. In many ways, specialty coffee is similar to wine."

Mark seeks top quality varieties from around the world. For example, one variety is called Mt. Everest Supreme. It is grown 100 kilometers from the summit. Another variety is St. Helena coffee, which comes from an Atlantic Ocean island that is only accessible by boat. The beans are delivered to Lindsborg in burlap bags or barrels.

Then comes the roasting process. "It is a cross between cooking a recipe and an art form. Sometimes it resembles a mad scientist experiment," Mark said with a smile. With his years of experience, he is able to manage the roasting process so as to maximize richness and flavour. "We get it into the bag within two hours of roasting for maximum freshness," Mark said.

Blacksmith Coffee roasts, packages, and ships both whole bean and ground coffee. The company also custom-packages coffee for other customers.

Exciting changes are ahead for Blacksmith Coffee. The company has been bought by the family which owns the nearby coffee shop that will be moving into the blacksmith shop with the roastery. The old brick building is being further remodelled so that the roasting operation can go into the back and the front can be a restaurant.

The company's product has been described as exquisite coffee, artisan roasted. Blacksmith Coffee has shipped coffee as far away as Indonesia and Munich, Germany – very impressive for a company in a rural community like Lindsborg, population 3,458 people. Now, that's rural.

For more information, go to blacksmithcoffee.com.

Bali. Brazil. Guatemala. Himalayan highlands. Kenya. Antigua. All these serve as sources for the top quality coffee being prepared at the Blacksmith Roastery in Lindsborg. We salute Mark Galloway for making a difference by serving those who are coffee connoisseurs.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.