

Why This Pet Industry Entrepreneur Pivoted Production To Help Fight COVID-19

F forbes.com/sites/alisoncoleman/2020/04/29/why-this-pet-industry-entrepreneur-pivoted-production-to-help-fight-covid-19

29 квітня 2020 р.

Alison Coleman

Senior Contributor ⓘ

Apr 29, 2020, 09:51am EDT

As businesses navigate the global pandemic and find new ways of working, many have pivoted their operations to contribute to COVID-19 relief efforts. Maryland-based RestoraPet is one of them.

The company is better known for its pet supplements, but has adapted its production operations to manufacture much-needed hand sanitizer for distribution to nursing homes throughout Maryland, Virginia and Washington D.C.

As a registered nurse and a former director of a nursing home, for CEO and cofounder Brian Larsen it's a labor of love, and also a fitting tribute to the man who first helped him on the road to business success.

Larsen's entrepreneurial aspirations began when he was a teenager with the death of his beloved pet Siberian Husky, Bandit. The dog had suffered throughout her final years of life, eventually losing her battle with cancer. The experience affected Larsen so profoundly that he made it his mission to find or create a supplement that would improve the quality of life for pets as they go through the aging process.

"From that point on that goal guided every job I took and every decision I made, and eventually led to the creation of RestoraPet," he says.

While still at school he began working part-time at a local pharmacy and was one of the youngest pharmacy technicians that company ever hired. From there he landed a role as assistant to Kenny Kramm, the founder and CEO of FLAVORx, who taught him a great deal about the ins and outs of business.

Larsen left FLAVORx to pursue academic qualifications, earning degrees in science and nursing, and he eventually became director of nursing for a small chain of senior care homes. It was a demanding role, but he never gave up on his dream of developing a product that would restore the wellbeing of people's elderly pets.

Most evenings were spent in his makeshift home lab creating Vitalitrol, a super antioxidant that is now the proprietary ingredient used in RestoraPet products. In 2014, while still working full time in nursing, he reconnected with his former boss Kramm. The two teamed up as business partners to launch RestoraPet. Sadly, two years later, his cofounder and mentor passed away.

“Losing Kenny to an untimely death was devastating, but I wanted to honor him for everything he had invested in me and in RestoraPet, and that further fueled my desire to make this work,” says Larsen. “I decided to self-fund RestoraPet while I enrolled at UVA’s Darden School of Business to study for my MBA.”

He continued to divide his time between the business and his day job, but with sales increasing, driven by positive customer reviews from all over the world, Larsen knew he had a big decision to make. If he was going to optimize its success he needed to turn his attention full time to RestoraPet, and in 2018, he did.

Through connections at Darden he attracted his first major investor, former CEO of Perot Systems Morton Meyerson. As several more high profile investors and advisors came on board the business began to flourish. Larsen recently completed his MBA.

Then the coronavirus outbreak reached the U.S., and Larsen began to hear the stories of severe shortages of hand sanitizer hindering the healthcare sector’s battle against the pandemic. With his nursing and care home background he had a unique understanding of how the elderly were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 pandemic, and could empathize with the needs of their health care providers.

He describes his decision to adapt his production line at RestoraPet to manufacture the much-needed hand sanitizer as a ‘no brainer’. “We needed to source the highest quality ingredients, well above the standards required by government regulations,” says Larsen. “It took us a few weeks to get them, but only a matter of days to get the sanitizer produced and bottled.”

Manufactured under the Rejuvien brand, in addition to RestoraPet, the hand sanitizer is being donated free of charge to nursing homes across Maryland, D.C., and Virginia, with some available for purchase at a minimal charge to help offset some of the costs associated with the charitable venture.

RestoraPet is on track to generate over \$10 million in revenue this year, up from \$2 million in 2019, and currently employs 15 members of staff, including seven at its prime manufacturing facility. It is the culmination of many years of hard work, but business success aside, Larsen believes that if a company has the means to help society in other ways, their conscience should compel them to do more.

He is especially proud to be supporting the same care sector that supported him during his early days as an entrepreneur.

He says: “The success of RestoraPet enables us to contribute to society, both as the manufacturer of a product that helps to improve the lives of pets, and as the provider of a product that is helping health care facilities during this time of extraordinary need.”



Alison Coleman

I'm a freelance journalist, founder of Coleman Media. For the last 20 years I've covered business stories for national and international online and print publications, with a special

...