

LINDENWOOD

Connecting to Alumni and Friends

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Peter Cohen with his locomotive-shaped coffee bean roaster at his business, Stringbean Coffee.



MBA ALUMNUS GOES FROM BEAN COUNTER TO BEAN ROASTER

by CHUCK MCPHERSON

Peter Cohen ('98) is having fun. Cohen owns Stringbean Coffee Company, a coffee wholesaler in St. Louis, Mo.

One look around the Stringbean Coffee Company headquarters gives you a glimpse into Cohen's life. A wall full of guitars. A neon sign. A '50s-style diner booth. Cohen's journey to becoming a full-time coffee roaster is like no other. Cohen worked in the banking industry for 14 years and earned an MBA from Lindenwood University in 1998.

"I liked the campus," Cohen said. "A few of my friends went to Lindenwood and were faculty, and I had been to some of the events and was able to see the campus grow. It's such a pretty campus and has continued to blow me away with their success and growth."

While still working at the bank, Cohen, who loves coffee, began roasting coffee as a hobby in his garage in March 2011.

"I thought, 'Maybe I could do it better,'" he said. "I got a very small roaster that didn't come with instructions, and I bought some beans. I started with really expensive Fair Trade organic beans, so you don't want to screw up a whole lot. The first batch I did was inside and the smoke alarms went off and dogs were howling, and then it became more of an outside sport. It then moved to my garage, so I would roast at 10, 11 o'clock at night, and I came out with a roast called Midnight Run."

"I just want to have fun doing what I'm doing, and I've accomplished that."

Peter Cohen

He started Stringbean Coffee Company in May 2011, and after an eight-month overlap of banking and roasting, he said goodbye to the corporate grind and focused on Stringbean in October.

The Stringbean roasting room features a 25-pound San Franciscan roaster, built especially for him, that resembles a train engine, a wall full of framed vinyl records, and the original disco ball used from 1972 to 1978 on the television show *Soul Train*.

"Folks would ask, 'Why would you roast coffee under a disco ball?'" and I would respond, "Well, why wouldn't I roast coffee under a disco ball?"" he said.

Cohen said that Stringbean is a labor of love and a combination of his interests, which include music and coffee. Cohen plays bass guitar, collects music, and used to review music with around 200 published articles to his credit. He still uses his Lindenwood education regularly.

"I use my MBA more now as an independent, self-employed coffee roaster than I did as a commercial banker," Cohen said. "I handle billing, marketing, bookkeeping, collections, play guitar, and drink coffee. I do roasting, help with bagging and distribution. I was a bean counter before I became a bean cooker, but I'm still a bean counter."

Cohen said the Stringbean mission statement is to educate, motivate, and entertain as many people as possible in an honest and ethical manner and have fun doing it.

"I just want to have fun doing what I'm doing," he said, "and I've accomplished that."