

SUMMER 2011

# Missouri State

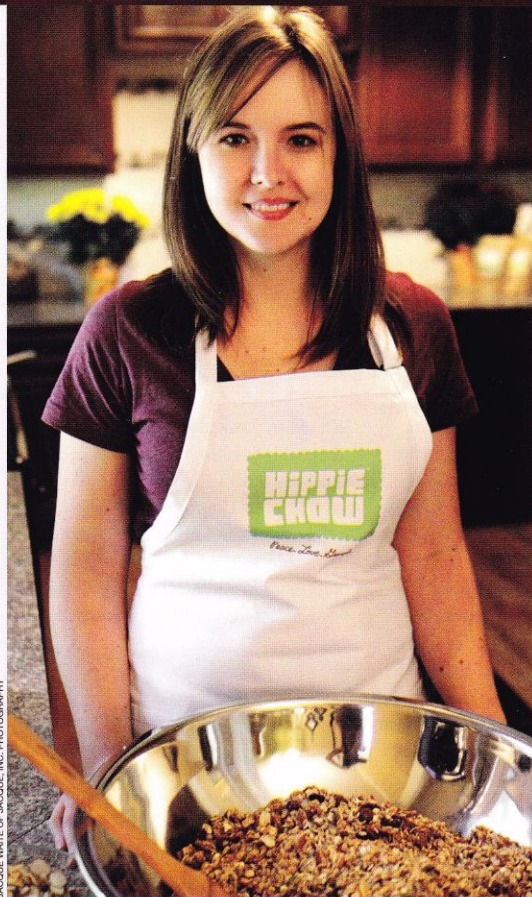
THE MAGAZINE PUBLISHED FOR THE ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY ■ VOL. 6 ■ ISSUE 2

## **BEARS** who mean **BUSINESS!**

Get useful tips — everything from how to start a company to how to tip during a hotel stay — from alumni entrepreneurs, managers, manufacturers and more.

### **PLUS:**

- Spotlight stories on other alumni business leaders
- Meet Paul Lusk, the new men's head basketball coach
- Essay on University's response to deadly Joplin tornado



JACQUE WATTE OF JACQUE, INC. PHOTOGRAPHY

Epicurean entrepreneur:

## Valerie Jennings

**LIVES IN:** Lenexa, Kan.

**BUSINESS:** Hippie Chow gourmet granola

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor's in finance with minor in economics, 2003, Missouri State; master's in business administration, 2010, Rockhurst University

About halfway through that summer I was put into contact with a manager from Dean & DeLuca. That September they put it in all six of their U.S. retail stores and on their website. That was a real catalyst for growth. Hippie Chow is now in about 30 stores, most of which are in the Kansas City area.

### So you're one of those people

#### who defy the cliché "don't quit your day job"?

Yes! I had a full-time job working with defaults on commercial mortgages until the end of 2010. I have been doing Hippie Chow full-time since January and now make it in a space I rent in a commercial kitchen.

#### What is the future of your company?

Everything is handmade, and that is the plan for the indefinite future — I don't want to grow if I can't do it right. Right now I am the only employee, but I am on the cusp of getting other people involved.

#### What were you like at Missouri State — were you a business dynamo?

I was kind of a nerdy college student! I lived in honors housing for the first two years and have fond memories of

my roommates. My studies all instilled in me a work ethic. I like and expect to work hard and expect my job to give me a sense of satisfaction. I want to create something that's greater than me. ■

#### ADVICE FROM VALERIE:

### How to start a small business

"I loved the idea of being an entrepreneur, but I was so scared to take what I thought was a huge risk that I almost talked myself out of it! So I say, don't be afraid to make changes to get what you need out of life," Valerie said. "From a practical standpoint, be sure to make a business plan. And there are lots of resources, many available at no charge, for entrepreneurs."

Some examples:

- The U.S. Small Business Administration is a good place to start: [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)
- Look for a small business development center in your city — they have huge networks of contacts.

#### Small business resources at Missouri State University

Missouri State is in the process of opening The Robert W. Plaster Center for Free Enterprise and Business Development, which will provide a one-stop shop for new small businesses by giving guidance and assisting with start-up activities. Learn more: [www.missouristate.edu/ideacommons/plastercenter.htm](http://www.missouristate.edu/ideacommons/plastercenter.htm)

#### Tell us the story of Hippie Chow.

I love to cook; I like to know where my food comes from and how it is produced. I started making granola for my boyfriend because he had been buying that highly processed stuff at the store. I started toying with the idea of selling my granola as a "hobby" business. The tipping point was when I came up with the name, which is a play on "Puppy Chow" and the tie between the terms "hippie" and "granola." The name was my one flash of creativity in my whole life! I went online and found no one else using it. I thought, "OK, now I have to take it a step further."

#### You started small and have expanded rapidly into some major stores.

I first started selling Hippie Chow in May 2010 from a booth at Overland Park Farmers Market in Kansas City.