Sounds Good

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2009

Big Deals: What to say ... what not to say

I was actually reading "Turn Small Talk into Big Deals" in a waiting room. This networking book about customizing conversation styles for clients has a chapter on that. With some new approaches, Don Gabor illustrates how to garner clients at every place from a museum and golf courses to reunions and elevators. He even suggests what to avoid discussing:

Potential waiting room topics: newspaper articles, sudoku puzzles, celebrity news, herbal medicine.

Taboo waiting room topics: medical horror stories, malpractice suits, insurance fraud.

Boxed in

Except for the purple and gold Mardi Gras shoes I wear each year, my shoes are all exposed in the closet. It is Texas and we don't have such a collection of summer vs. winter shoes as our northern sisters may accumulate.

My Shoes Under space-saving shoes organizers is for other stuff. Southern sisters still have a rash of goodies we'd love to store under the bed. Shoes Under is an As Seen on TV product that's as durable and handy as is promoted. A clear cover zips over 6 sections that can store craft items, etc. just as easily as out-of-season pumps. It's a keeper.

Making scents

Artificial scents give me a big headache, literally. Aura Cacia has a new line of electric aromatherapy air fresheners that use 100 percent pure essential oils. I can detect a difference, especially with Relaxing Lavender. I know this scent is said to induce a calm mood for sleep, but I love how the company promotes it as "reminiscent of a Ukrainian meadow of flowering lavender stems. It creates a soothing environment for relaxation in the bedroom or living room." I actually have a relative who lived there, so I'll ask about this. I'm going to the valley soon, so I hope I can vouch for the Refreshing Lime & Grapefruit tout that it "evokes the crisp scent of Mexican lime trees swaying in the breeze. (You can almost hear the thump of the falling ripe fruit.)"

Summer beauty

Down south, we may get cracked lips in winter, but imagine how we'd feel in a snowy clime. Here, we need to keep those little balm sticks handy for sunscreen. Coola Liplux in peppermint/vanilla has SPF 15 and is made with organic, food-grade ingredients such as raspberry and avocado butters. It feels good, smells good and lives up to a label claim: "a truly tasty treatment."

The Body Deli — doesn't that name sound great? — makes the most routine tasks seem exotic. Of the company's wide range of treatments, I've experienced the aromatic, cooling Fresh Cell sea cucumber gelee that you keep in the fridge. Talk about a refreshing wake-up treat. The ingredient list sounds like a shopping spree with kombucha tea, virgin coconut oil, fresh cells of cucumber, kiwi and olive leaf extract. It's very cool, along with the botanical facial masque Glacial Mineral Mud, which you also keep in the fridge. Carrot seed and Japanese honeysuckle are some of the goodies in this feel-good mask. Both should put the glow into, and take the heat out of, summer.

Frais puts Australian blended essential oils in the best-smelling hand sanitizer I've ever experienced. With ginger, tangerine, lemon, myrtle, basil as just part of the mix, there's a real luxury sensation going on. I first heard of the product when we were frantic about swine flu, but hey, we need hand sanitizer all the time. Some of us more than others.

Even lip balm is going organic. Coola Liplux offer raspberry butter, an antioxidant; rose hips with omega-3 and 6; and avocado butter for sterolins to reduce age spots and repair sun damage. I tried a sample of the peppermint vanilla and loved it. Part of the $12 fee goes toward skin cancer research.

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POSTED BY THE PORT ARTHUR NEWS AT 2:13 PM 0 SOUNDERS

REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 2009

"That's not my bag, baby," is Austin Powers' line. Jennifer Chandler will tell you, salad, in a bag, is her bag.

"Simply Salads" has pages of crispy, green inspirations to prove it. With most of the prep work tumbling out of bags, she spends her time on the meat, vegetables and tuna to create masterpieces. Add candied walnuts, hearts of palm, pears, grits croutons or tuna to a variety of greens for summer flair. Grilled romaine with green goddess and a crawfish remoulade are two temptations. Here are two quick dressings from Chandler's stash of ideas:

Honey-Lime Vinaigrette

Try this on a bag of angel hair cole slaw and add shucked corn.

1/2 cup freshly-squeezed lime juice
2 tablespoons honey
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly-ground pepper.

In a small bowl, whisk together the lime juice, honey and oil until well combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Raspberry Vinaigrette

3 tablespoons raspberry balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon freshly-squeezed lemon juice
5 tablespoons canola oil
Kosher salt and freshly-ground pepper.

In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar and lemon juice. Slowly add the oil in a steady stream, whisking until emulsified. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Vanilla excitement

I recently shared recipes from the Nielsen-Massey Vanillas Inc. cookbook. Now I've tried the product. Ever heard try vanilla powdered? Organic Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Powder gave my frozen berries a kick. It's also suggested for baked goods and drinks. Makers suggest an apricot mango vanilla sauce for barbecued ribs with crisp green salads topped with seasonal garden vegetables and a quick vanilla-infused vinaigrette. Add a teaspoon of Mexican Pure Vanilla Extract to mellow out slow-cooked famous baked beans, they say, and sprinkle chunked sweet potatoes with a little vanilla sugar, grilling spices and a touch of butter, wrap them up in foil packets and throw them on the grill.

Guiltless Gourmet

I was going to say my favorite Guiltless Gourmet flavor is the chili lime (I'm always about the spice) but my daughter Jazz is right. The unsalted yellow corn is more ... "all terrain." They go with anything, are baked, and now have a "bolder taste and crispier crunch. I've enjoyed this brand before because the makers are going out of their way to bring an age-old food back to its roots. Look what we've done to it over the years. I just tried to impress a skilled cook — my mother — about my discovery. Turns out she's already a Guiltless Gourmet fan.

These chips are organic and the company is having a contest. Makers are offering a chance to win a "guiltless" trip to Sin City, through Sept. 30. Look on the bag for the code that can be redeemed at www.GuiltlessGourmet.com. Someone's going to Vegas.

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REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2009

SOUNDS GOOD
Darragh Doiron

Summer time on your hands? Make it family time

Dennis, an 11-year-old guest to my home, excitedly told how his father helped inspire him to write letters to people in the news. He hadn't even read "Giving is Living: 101 Ways to Practice Effortless Generosity."

Sister authors Marnie and Tisha Howard begin with a potentially life-changing quote from someone else:

"Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: Kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile." — Mother Teresa

Pages of ideas include generous acts to do as a family, such as:

- Write a letter to a distant relative.
- Volunteer for a community project.
- Create and give a photo album to a beloved grandparent.
- Share household chores willingly. Give Mom or Dad a break.

Here's news on more family stuff:

Parent perils

With chapters titled "Another Call from School," "The Eighth-Grade Prom" and "Are We There Yet," Beth J. Harpaz has lived the stories of many American parents. But she sure can tell 'em funny, with empathy and with a little lesson at the end.

She's lived through teacher conferences, the real-or-imagined glares of other PTA moms and the fear of transforming from Terrible Mother to Lunatic Mother.

Other parents may get some summer reading relief in her book, "13 is the new 18: And Other Things My Children Taught Me While I Was Having a Nervous Breakdown Being Their Mother.

Dads cut up on the grill

Woe to the family member who puts my kitchen shears in the drawer or dishwasher where I can't find them. They need to be at the ready, because I use them as least as often as my favorite knife. Cutco bills itself as "The World's Finest Cutlery" and is proud of its Super Shears advertising that "They're called SUPER for a reason." There's no gimmick here, like a crazy curved pair I once got to chop salad right in the bowl. Super Shears's forged blades come apart for cleaning and could be just what Dad needs to cut up chicken at the grill site or snip garden herbs for backyard cookery. If dad or mom spies a Cutco catalogue, the wish list will grow. There are some mighty tempting basic and specialty items that make cooking fun.

- Grill note: McCormick has new bottles of 30-minute marinades in Signature Smokehouse and Buffalo BBQ. I tried the buffalo straight up on eggs and chips with no complaints. I imagine using it the proper way is a perk. I sprinkled the dry contents of the new Mojito Lime marinade on frozen corn and it was peachy. Hawaiian Luau marinade is also new.

Think inside the cube

Dads who formed their cultural relevance in the '80s know the Rubik's Cube. Rubik's Revolution Titanium Edition is for their kids. Those days may or may not get into this talking, flashing cube. I liked it much more than the headache-triggering original; my daughter nabs high score on any of the six games in the cube; her dad says it just makes him want his original cube from high school.

My fave is the easiest. Play it in the dark: punch the color of light that is glowing at that moment. We think the game makes some weird pig snorts as a count-down. Even though you aren't moving the walls of the cube, it still flies around in your hand as you play the games, just like the original.

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REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2009

Look out for great dads

Let the world know your Groves dad is great.

The Groves Chamber of Commerce & Tourist Center will accept nominations for the Groves Father of the Year essay contest through noon on Friday, June 12.

Write a nomination letter telling why this dad should be top father in 200 words or fewer. Include his name and address as well as the submittor's name and address and day phone number.

Anyone may submit a nomination, but the nominee must be a resident of Groves. A committee will review the entries and the person who submitted the winning entry will be notified the week of June 7.

The Chamber office is at 4399 Main Ave. in Groves. For information, call 962-3631.

Longneck Road update

Ron Arceneaux of Longneck Road says the band plans to spend the next several weeks finishing up their debut album and performing locally.

"We have contacts with several promoters and booking agents, and once the album is finished, we are going to be working hard to set up some additional high-profile shows," the bass player said. "Given that we do mostly original music in more of a show format, we're excited about the prospect of picking up some opening act gigs," said band member Dick LeMasters.

The guys played the recent Boys Haven Food & Music Festival at Ford Park.

"Getting the chance to play on the main stage at Ford Pavilion was definitely a step up for us," said singer and guitar player LeMasters.

Arceneaux agreed, adding "ever since Ford Pavilion opened, it has been a personal goal to get the chance to play at that amazing facility. The sound system was great and Ford Pavilion most definitely rivals the Cynthia Woods Mitchell facility in the Woodlands."

Django Walker closed out the show.

"We had the chance to hear Still Cruisin' and Django Walker, and both bands were excellent," said drummer Robert Arena. "We'd like to thank all of our friends and fans who came out to support us, and also Robert Pate, Jim Ferrell and the rest of the Boys Haven directors for putting on such a well-run event," said lead guitarist Miles Sykes.

Galveston Park makes big splash

The Travel Channel picked Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark to make a splash in "Extreme Waterparks 2009." A crew shot in the park on Wednesday.

Spread the news

Reader Vickie L. Jacquet let The News know about Camryn Washington, the 3-year-old who got help when her grandmother, Mary Carter, fell. I enjoyed meeting this family and sharing their story. They're the kind of people in the kind of situations that make my job a pleasure.

Readers, let me know what good's going on by contacting me at:

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POSTED BY THE PORT ARTHUR NEWS AT 7:09 AM 0 SOUNDERS

REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2009

Chocolate for breakfast ... You got a problem with that?

Some of us can get a little defensive about our chocolate love. Other's just go with the flow. "Chocolate for Breakfast" will take bean lovers to new levels.

Barbara Passino's new book is as decadent as its title offering goodies such as: Margarita Tapioca served in a cocoa-rimmed glass; Harry's Grilled Salmon with Zucchini Curry Sauce; and Chocolate-Filled Toast Pillows topped with lemon and lime zest.

She's got tips and tricks: For a centerpiece, try firecracker sausage bundles: Tie a bundle of cooked sausages with a leek green or ribbon and stick a sparkler in it. Dynamite.

She's got a passion she wants to share with eager readers of like mind. Every page and picture brings a sigh and a promise of something amazing. Here's an unexpected chocolate quickie:

Watermelon and Feta Salad

3 cups watermelon, cut into 1-inch cubes
1 large shallot, finely chopped
Juice from 1 lime
2 cups crumbled feta cheese
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/2 teaspoon powdered chocolate
1/2 teaspoon salt

Place the watermelon chunks in a beautiful bowl. Lightly toss the shallot, lime juice and feta together and then toss them with the watermelon. Sprinkle the cayenne, chocolate and salt over the top and toss lightly. Cover the bowl with a plate or plastic wrap and chill it for at least half an hour up to 2 to 3 hours before serving.

Drink up your summer

It's new and I like it. Santa Cruz Organic's Mango Lemonade can go into this mocktail:

Fruity Arnold Palmer

- Combine equal parts iced tea (perhaps Santa Cruz Organic Lemon Tea) and Santa Cruz Organic Mango Lemonade
- Pour into a tall glass over ice
- Sip slowly and melt into summertime

Strawberry and raspberry combos are also in this line. You can find these at Whole Foods markets, one of my favorite Houston stops.

TeaZer — Thank Santa Cruz for that organic goodness in these 12-ounce bottles of passion fruit, pear, lemon, etc. They're sparkling, have zing and make your summer salad or sandwich lunch fizz.

TeaZazz — Rex Lee from "Entourage" and actor Judd Nelson are zazzing up their lives with TeaZazz, and I'm right behind them. Two women started this sparkling tea business and I love the flavor, the bubbles and the antioxidants and the notion that there are relatively few calories in this good stuff.

Dragonfly?

Cody on the desk will try anything, and I appreciate that in a person. I told him Organic Green Stevia looked like file, but you put it in your drinks for sweetness. He tried a spoonful and pronounced it tasted like "Dragonfly."

I asked if that was some energy drink.

No. He rides motorcycles, and said it tastes like a fresh dragonfly hitting you in the mouth.

Those of us who adjusting to more healthy foods may be able to relate, but I'm not in a hurry for this one. For those who must sweeten their drinks, the Navitas Naturals bag of stevia is a good, low-calorie option. The South American sweetener has long been celebrated by the Guarani and Mato Grosso Indians, but it's still new to many North Americans.

Natives call it the white flowered herb, indigenous to Paraguay, the "Honey Leaf."

In addition to the new Organic Green Stevia, Navitas Naturals offers a plethora of organic superfoods and sweeteners, including raw cacao, mesquite, lucuma, acai, yacon, mulberries, maca, camu camu, palm sugar ... the list goes on. I tried some on a grilled banana and it was exotic. Navitas has a trendy metal drink bottle to shake up your goodies.

No need for naked popcorn

I'm relatively popcorn obsessed. Even though I sometimes make popcorn a meal, I'd never heard of Kernel Season's, apparently the nation's No. 1 brand of popcorn seasoning. The Kernel promotes "No more naked popcorn" and has a new all-natural butter-flavored, zero calorie popcorn spritzer that's an amazing burst of flavor on the chewy, fluffy Premium Raw Kernel Popping Corn kernels. They pop up crazy big. The spritzer has canola, sunflower and corn oils and makes it movie-theater good with zero fat credit for a serving. I'm now a fan of the Kernel's seasoning shakers in White Cheddar or Nacho Cheddar, Ranch, Jalapeno, etc. The corn itself is dubbed as the highest quality popcorn available and nearly hull-less. I can't imagine anyone not loving it.

Granola like no other

Five Star Bar has a back story. Dark chocolate became a "high priority" in the development. Lake Champlain Chocolates of Vermont made these gold-wrapped chunks that look like gold bars and loaded them with maple granola, roasted almonds, oats and tart dried cranberries. Somehow they're crunchy, and suspended in chocolate and almond paste that melts in your happy mouth.

Lake Champlain Chocolates are preservative-free and Kosher-certified and crafted in small batches. Could it be time for a road trip to Vermont?

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POSTED BY THE PORT ARTHUR NEWS AT 7:31 AM 0 SOUNDERS

REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

'Garbage makes for 'the' summer bag; 'Diesel' dad for Father's Day

My grade school friend Christy LaCour and her sisters chewed a lot of gum so they could weave never-ending chains of gum wrappers. Those joined looped soda pop top chains that snaked around the back-yard play shed. I'm still impressed when I see woven works. Bazura Biz has expanded its Woven Bag line of eco-friendly bags and accessories that Filipino women in a co-op make from recycled juice containers. They're turning trash into one-of-a-kind treasures: durable, eye-catching bags that make a summer splash. School children are paid to collect thousands of used juice containers a day that are sanitized to get out of the landfill and become art. I'm crazy for a strong, durable orange shoulder bag and red makeup bag. Wording from the brand and nutritional label peeks through some folds and becomes part of the design, but mostly the eye sees texture and color. I'm not alone in my infatuation. America Ferrera's "Ugly Betty" character has a big tote. Visit bazurashop.com to see new styles, including: a belt and key fob. New colors: silver and multi. Imagine: "basura" is the Filipino word for garbage. This stuff is usable art.

Diesel for dad

I've always loved the smell of diesel — the fuel — because it reminds me of filling up the tank for long, adventurous road trips. It's nothing like Diesel's Only the Brave scent. The packaging is a strong silver fist holding a vial of the fragrance being promoted for Father's Day. That ought to make a statement on dad's dressing table. Who knew, but a man can embrace his "inner rebel," as press info states, with top notes of lemon blossom, mandarin and coriander leaves. I like the stuff. A little will take you a great distance.

Bamboo buys

Light, smooth bamboo fibers are showing up in everything, including towels and T-shirts I've shared in this space. The stalks put me in the mind of a relaxed, purposeful, Asian setting. "Tree-huggers" are excited that the plants can grow up to four feet daily, so it's renewable. The line called "ecotools" thought bamboo would make fine handles for a line of "earth-friendly beauty products. Handles are of bamboo and bristles are of vegan taklon bristles. The line has a range of shapes and makers are especially proud of a retractable kabuki brush. Travel sizes come in a linen and hemp bag. I'm especially impressed with bamboo powder puffs which are velvety soft. They look great and feel great.

Summer skin

Pevonia Botanica smells and feels like something from Marie Antoinette would have used, based on the Sophia Coppola movie I just saw. She had the best of everything. I've become addicted to an aromatherapy face oil for combination to oily skin that feels like an instant spa treatment. I've never used anything with the word "peeling" in the title, but the so-called peeling cream goes on and comes off smooth.

P'farm crisping it up

Most people call them "those little cigar shaped cookie things," but my daughter and I know about pirouettes. Our Canadian relative serves them frequently and we associate those crispy rolls with something special. Pepperidge Farms always keeps up with trends and now has little tins of "petite" pirouettes in chocolate crème and twists in sweet cinnamon. They're both so sweet and crunchy and designed to be eaten in 90-calorie servings, which is doable, with a modicum of restraint. Go ahead and see if you are the kind of consumer who can know when to say when to an indulgent treat.

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POSTED BY THE PORT ARTHUR NEWS AT 7:31 AM 0 SOUNDERS

REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

THURSDAY, MAY 28, 2009

Taco time

What would you do with:

Chicken with apples and goat cheese, ceviche with coconut ginger, honey bacon, lamb, elk and calamari and blackened tomato?

If you never would have said, put them in tortillas, then Mark Miller's beautiful book "Tacos" could be for you. It is for me. I want one on every page.

None of the amazing photographs show anything like the basic, fast food processed fillings America has come to label "taco." Miller is the founder of Coyote Cafe in Santa Fe and also throws in some Thai ideas.

Super food

If you already consider chocolate a super food, read on:

I've shared Shaman Chocolates and the company's "socially responsible collection of gourmet, organic chocolate bars." I love the flavor and love the fair trade that supports Huichol Indians, a tribe living in central western Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains. They're said to be the last Indigenous Tribe in North America to have maintained their pre-Columbian traditions. Thankfully, chocolate skills are included. Fruity, almost crystal-like bits highlight the new Organic Dark Chocolate with Acai, Lemon & Orange and Organic Dark Chocolate with Green Tea & Ginger chocolate bars. I savor each square until the chocolate melts to reveal the tangy fruit.

Antioxidants, baby.

Click crazy

Admit it. You can almost expect an artificial after taste to many health products. Click Espresso Protein Drink is the first I could actually crave. I'm surprised that with just water, and a shake up in a crazy cool shaker with a noisy metal sphere that mixes the powder up, I got a rich drink. I put it in a blender with ice for a great shake. You can drink it hot, but they have me at shake. Double Shot Espresso is high in protein and low in calories, has vitamins and minerals and is an alternative to sugary coffee drinks. Ingredients include calcium caseinate, instant espresso coffee, fructose, powder and sunflower oil. It's the best think I've ever had out of a big plastic carton.

Every penny counts: Try tips to save on groceries

The executive chef of a fancy restaurant in Washington, D.C. says you can eat well and be proactive about keeping the grocery budget down.

"Everyone is realizing that right now is the time to tighten the purse strings wherever you can, when grocery shopping," Enzo Febbraro, co-owner and executive chef of D'Acqua Ristorante, said in a press release e-mail.

Some tips:

- Plan ahead. Take a few minutes to plan out the meals you will make throughout the week. Write up a list of all the necessary ingredients needed, take the list to the store, and stick to it, which will help you avoid impulse purchases. You can save even more if you build your grocery list and meal planning around what is on sale, each week, by browsing store circular first.
- Compare products. Keep in mind that the most expensive items are usually at eye level. Look at the top shelves to find similar products that are less expensive. • Think beyond fresh. While fresh fruits and vegetables are great, they can also perish quickly, leading to wasted money, and they usually cost more to begin with. The American Dietetic Association reports that frozen and canned versions can be just as nutritious as the fresh, and are also usually more affordable and last longer. Just be sure to choose varieties that aren't laden with excess salt, sugar or sweeteners.
- Think big. Opt for larger portion sizes and create your own single-serving portions. Invest in some re-usable containers so you can easily put items in lunches or carry bags. Not only will buying in bulk save you money, but it's also better for the environment.

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REACTIONS: ☐ funny () ☐ interesting () ☐ cool ()

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SOUNDS GOOD?

Talking about great food, new products and community news usually does sound good to Darragh Doiron, Port Arthur News reporter. This blog is a compilation of her columns, Culinary Thrill Seeking, Community Scoop and Sounds Good.

Let her know what sounds good to you at ddoiron@panews.com.

Darragh Doiron is a reporter for The Port Arthur News

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