

# BERRIES TO THE MAX !!!

By Max Middleton and Beverly Roy

Photo Courtesy of Tannery Hill Studios, Inc.

**M**ax Middleton has grown up on the campus of Hebron Academy in Hebron, Maine. It is a dream location for a kid, with 1500 acres of rolling hills and woods, plenty of ball fields, an indoor hockey rink, and a brand new athletic center all at his disposal. On the flip side, Hebron is a rural town and a traditional lemonade stand on a hot summer day doesn't draw a lot of business.

When Hebron Academy hosted the EntrePrep Summer Institute in July 2008, Max jumped at the chance to run his own business. He didn't take lemons and make lemonade but he did use the natural resources available to him and make the most of them. Berries to the Max was born of a family tradition, a local delicacy and Max's entrepreneurial spirit.

There are blueberries everywhere in Maine, from the rocky coast to the foothills of the Presidential mountain range. Most Mainers have gone berry picking and Max is no exception. His family has enjoyed wild blueberries on their cereal and in pancakes and muffins for years. They have made their share of jam and ice cream topping from berries gathered on hikes and outings. Over the years they have given away a lot of jam and everyone always asked for more.

Max knew immediately what his EntrePrep business would be and where to get the most important ingredient. But he quickly realized that this was going to be a lot more work than just making jam. EntrePrep week began with speakers and presentations on generating ideas and putting together a business plan. Field trips to local businesses helped students understand finance and marketing and how to make a good presentation. Max would need to prove his concept could work; he needed to find a certified kitchen where he could produce his jam and somewhere

to sell it. Suddenly, time management was a big priority. How was he going to get all of this done, and make jam, in just a week?

The major ingredients in jam are berries, sugar and pectin, and Max needed berries. One batch fills about eight jars and he planned to make 72 jars (nine batches); this would require 36 cups of blueberries. Wild Maine blueberries are small and sweet and 36 cups would take a very long time to pick so Max compromised. He convinced a couple of friends to help out and they all picked blueberries on a hiking trail nearby. They also picked cultivated raspberries at a local farm. He had one day for production and found a certified kitchen available at the Greenwood Mountain Inn. The plan worked beautifully. Now he had two flavors to sell, his cost was still within his budget and he had time to get it all done.

On Friday afternoon Max set up in front of the post office, where he knew many town residents would stop to pick up their mail. He sold all 72 jars of jam, paid back his investor, and

made a profit of nearly \$100. Berries to the Max was a success. Max decided to keep going. He came up with a creative and 'green' marketing strategy. He would reuse jars and anyone who returned their jars to him would get a discount off their next purchase. This ensured him an inexpensive supply of jars and helped him predict his sales. He also branched out to add strawberry and peach jam.

In this small town, Berries to the Max is building a reputation and the word is getting around. People are suggesting new flavors and Berries to the Max is being served at the Inn. The jam is good and the ingredients are local. If only lemons grew in Maine, maybe Max would try marmalade!



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