



SUBMITTED PHOTO/MAYA BAMBOO

CASSIE AND Jay LaCourse display their Hot Bambu charcoal now available at Whole Foods in McCandless.

McCandless store only U.S. outlet selling charcoal made from bamboo

BY DEBORAH DEASY
STAFF WRITER

Enterprising Cassie and Jay LaCourse, both 37, urge folks to go green when firing up a backyard grill.

The couple, who live in Austin, Texas, offer lumps of charcoal made from easily renewable bamboo, a hardwood-like grass.

Whole Foods on Route 19 in McCandless currently is the only U.S. outlet for the couple's eco-friendly product Hot Bambu lump charcoal.

"It's been moving well," said Annie Nelson, leader of the store's marketing team.

"We're always glad to support people with a Pittsburgh connection and small businesses."

A five-pound bag of Hot Bambu coals — it extols them as "Hot. Healthy. Green." — costs \$8.99.

"It lasts as long as a comparable, 10-pound back of wood lump charcoal," said Cassie LaCourse, CEO of Maya Bamboo.

Bamboo charcoal also ignites quickly without lighter fluid and "gets to temperature very fast," said Cassie LaCourse.

Maya Bamboo is test marketing Hot Bambu lump charcoal at the Whole Foods in north-suburban Pittsburgh because a grocery buyer for the store used to room with Jay LaCourse, chief operating officer of Maya Bamboo, when both attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh.

"He (the grocery buyer) knew about our product and mentioned it to the team leader of the new (Whole Foods) store, and suddenly, Whole Foods was contacting us with great interest in the Hot Bambu charcoal," said Cassie LaCourse, also gemologist and jewelry designer.

"Jay, my husband, worked in a South Side deli while paying his way through (art) school," she said.

Jay LaCourse, a graphic designer, now heads his own RAW Design Studio. He designed the Hot Bambu lump charcoal bag, plus, the company's online site: www.hotbambu.com.

The LaCourses met about seven years ago while visiting their parents in the Toledo, Ohio area.

Noble efforts by others to plant bamboo in deforested areas of Bali helped to inspire the LaCourses' interest in marketing bamboo charcoal.

"They've been utilizing bamboo charcoal in Asia for centuries, because it's what they had," said Cassie LaCourse. "It's a centuries-old concept."

The couple produces Hot Bambu charcoal by baking waste bamboo otherwise discarded at plantations in Mexico, where bamboo is grown to make, for example, furniture.

"Our mission is to provide alternative product choices that help to lower the world's carbon footprint — one lump of sustainably grown and produced bamboo charcoal at a time," the LaCourses say in their promotional materials for Hot Bambu lump charcoal.

"Our product affects no trees or rainforests, period. Our production technology is highly efficient and cleaner than traditional methods," the LaCourses say.

"Hot Bambu lights fast, burns hot, and is the first product of its kind in the United States."

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