

BUSINESS

The Hour

In Brief

SCORE workshop to address plans

REGION

The local chapter of SCORE, Counselors to America's Small Business, will hold a workshop "Your Business Plan — How to Develop it and Keep it Current" from 9 a.m. to noon, Sept. 13, at UConn Stamford.

Topics will include addressing strengths and weaknesses, who is target market, who is competition; and understanding cash flow and financial tools.

Fee is \$25 for one person and \$35 for two from same company. Call (203) 847-7348 to reserve a spot.

Coach to give talk at ACP meeting

NORWALK

Bob Cuddy, a coach, will discuss how to be a successful coach at the ACP International (Southern Connecticut/Westchester chapter) meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. Sept. 17, at 301 Merritt 7 lobby level conference room.

Bob Cuddy is the current president of the Southern Connecticut/Westchester chapter of the Association of Psychological Type. His topics will include winning assignments, getting and keeping clients, and best fit coaching.

The fee is \$15 for ACP members and \$25 for nonmembers. Complimentary wine, soda and snacks will be served. For reservations, call Joan Learn at (203) 354-6601, or e-mail: joan.learn@ayers.com.

Insurance women to meet Sept. 9

NORWALK

The Insurance Women's Association of Southern Connecticut will hold a dinner/meeting at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 9, at the Norwalk Inn & Conference Center. Cost is \$25. For more information or to reserve a spot, call Lynn Gregorio at (203) 966-1679.

Seminar offered on debt management

NORWALK

A three-part seminar on Debt Management by Frank Ortega, vice president/financial manager of the Citibank Norwalk Financial Center, at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 16, 23, and 30, will be offered by the South Norwalk Branch Library, 10 Washington St. For more information, call (203) 899-2790.



Meghan and Renato Varas, of Simply Originals Beverages in the Rowayton Market, show some of their beverages recently. The beverages are based on all-natural, traditional Peruvian drinks with low sugar content.

Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN

Simply Originals offers health in a bottle in the Peruvian tradition

NORWALK

By **CHRIS BOSAK**
Hour Staff Writer

Rowayton resident Renato Varas remembers how important chicha morada was during his childhood in Peru.

Chicha morada — a drink made from purple corn — is commonplace in Peru. He recalls the smells emanating from his grandmother's and mother's kitchen as the drink was being brewed. He remembers taking breaks during soccer games and sucking on ice pops made from chicha morada.

As an added benefit to the drink, purple corn is high in antioxidants and widely considered one of the more healthy foods to be found.

Varas missed not only the drink when he moved to the United States in the 1980s, but also the tradition surrounding the drink, which according to Varas, was used by the Incas.

So Varas, along with his wife Meghan Varas, decided to do something about it. After finding the right formula — the ideal blend of taste and health benefits — the Varases left their corporate jobs and launched the drink company Simply Originals.

"There's a long tradition with that drink and the goal is to go back to that — the natural way of doing things — and bring the recipe here," Renato Varas said.

"Homemade, natural, fresh. This is what I grew up drinking."

Simply Originals currently features two drinks, one made with purple corn and the other with flax seed, another food known for its healthy quality. Two more drink flavors are in the works, according to the Varases.

The raw materials are from Peru and the drink is bottled in New Jersey.

Simply Originals is available locally in Rowayton Market, Rowayton Pizza, Brennan's in Rowayton, Palmer's Market in Darien, Spic and Span in Southport, Abbondanza in Westport, Walter Stewarts in New Canaan, Tommy K's in Stamford and various places in Manhattan.

The Varases also recently landed another big catch. Simply Originals will soon be available in the Whole Foods locations throughout the Northeast, including Westport/Norwalk and Greenwich. They also attracted plenty of attention as the recently held Natural Products Expo in Anaheim, Calif.

"We had low expectations but we were blown away with the response," Meghan Varas said. "With Whole Foods, it gives us some credibility as far as being a natural product."

While getting into Whole Foods is thus far the biggest step in the company's growth, Rowayton Market will always be the place

where Simply Originals was first available.

"This was the first place to carry the drinks," Meghan Varas said during a recent interview with *The Hour* at Rowayton Market. "This is a very supportive community. It's very community-based and we try to focus on that as well."

The Varases participate in events such as the Rowayton River Ramble and fundraisers for the Rowayton Community Association.

With an industry success rate of about five percent, the Varases know they face challenges ahead, but they believe in their product and plan to take a slow-growth approach.

"We're still pretty much doing it ourselves," Renato Varas said.

The do-it-yourself approach also applies to demonstrations the couple holds at the various locations where Simply Originals is sold. The Varases give out samples and educate passersby on the health benefits of their drinks.

"We understand that the long part in developing a brand is the educational part," Meghan said. "But we believe that people should hear it from the owners. You get great taste with a lot of health benefits and only 60 calories per serving."

On the Web

www.simply-originals.com

Fannie, Freddie shares rise for third straight day

WASHINGTON

By **ALAN ZIBEL**
Associated Press

Shares of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac climbed for a third straight day Wednesday, as investors appeared less certain that a government bailout of the two troubled mortgage companies will happen anytime soon.

Shares of the mortgage finance companies plummeted last week as fears mounted they would soon need government support and that any bailout would leave stockholders in the lurch.

The government-sponsored companies hold or guarantee half the U.S. mortgage debt and are considered crucial to the mortgage market's continued operation.

But shares of both have climbed back in recent days, as analysts have cast doubt on whether any government rescue is truly inevitable or imminent.

Fannie shares rose 72 cents, or 12.8 percent, to \$6.34 in afternoon trading, while Freddie advanced 61 cents, or 15.4 percent, to \$4.58.

Merrill Lynch analyst Kenneth Bruce wrote in a research note Wednesday that speculation about an infusion of capital by the U.S. government is "somewhat premature" as Fannie and Freddie's financial cushion against losses won't be depleted "for several quarters."

Investors "are overly discounting a possible catastrophic event," he wrote.

Similarly, Citigroup analyst Bradley Ball said in a research note Monday that Fannie and Freddie still have options despite their steep stock declines in recent weeks, adding that "we are not convinced that (the government) needs to take any action over the near term."

Washington-based Fannie Mae completed a \$2 billion sale of short-term debt on Wednesday, two days after McLean, Va.-based Freddie Mac sold the same amount of debt.

Other analysts, however, continue to express a gloomier outlook.

Concern also has been growing that a government rescue of Fannie and Freddie could be costly for scores of investment, banking and insurance companies that hold billions of dollars in their preferred shares.

The two companies had nearly \$36 billion in preferred shares outstanding as of June 30, according to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission.



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