

Couleecap's Business Start-up Programs Provide Tools and Support for Entrepreneurs

Over a decade ago, Bree and Eric of B & E's trees were still just dreaming about starting a business. Bree was working at a local food coop and Eric in Milwaukee working in the engineering field. The unmistakable pull to be closer to the old growth forest in the Coulees was upon them, but they needed a little help to figure out making it all work.

"I took the Co-Starters program offered by Couleecap in 2015," Bree recalled. "It was the first time they had offered it. We knew we wanted to transition to maple syrup full time but stepping away from a 'normal job' can be intimidating. There are expectations at a normal job of what needs to be done and you comfortably know what those are, but when you start a small business, you're the one creating the expectations and all the aspects of what the work looks like. There ended up being so much value for me in the Co-Starters Program. It took this amorphous cloud of information that you know you need to do to put together a business and it gave me the tools to put that information to work."

The course was so successful for Bree, that she helped facilitate a Co-Starters course herself, sharing some of the information she gained. "I actually still have the binders from that program," Bree added with a chuckle. "And you know what, I still pull them out from time to time to consult them because the tools they offer are still that valuable to me."

With the help of the Co-Starters Program coupled with their dream and drive the pair were able to take the step towards a career and future that held a special place in their heart. Farming was a place both Bree and Eric held close as they were both fortunate to grow up with with strong ties to it, Bree at her grandmothers' farm in rural Prairie du Chien and Eric at family farms in the Dakotas.

"I grew up close enough to the dairy industry in the 1990's just wringing people out to know that it wasn't the right route for me, but at the same time I had this love for running around out in the woods and always carried a background fascination with the process of making maple syrup," Bree explained.

"For me, I found when I was out doing maple syrup I wasn't experiencing such a harsh seasonal depression anymore," Eric shared. "I was outside during this exceptional season and I had purpose, I felt energized being out in the woods and it was a kind of energy that carries you through to the warmer seasons."

"It (maple syrup season) really changes your place in the time scale," Bree mused. "You're out there and watching time change in a different way. First you see moss, then you see ramps and then spring hepaticas." The couple tap their trees in a sugar bush that contains



“There ended up being so much value for me in the Co-Starters Program.”

-Bree

Couleecap
your local community *action* program



A United Way member agency

A equal opportunity employer and service provider.
Auxiliary aids and services available upon request.

Our Mission

Couleecap fights poverty and promotes self-sufficiency, economic development, and social justice. We are **People Helping People**, and every day our actions make a difference in the lives of people and families throughout the Coulee Region.

some 200-year-old maples among the old growth forests surrounding rural Cashton and Westby area.

While still in their infancy the harvesting end of B and E trees suffered a substantial loss when an extreme flooding event ravaged their region, washing away infrastructure, equipment, and changing the landscape forever. During their time of crisis, they were able to turn to Couleecap again. Couleecap worked with donors and grant funders to help distribute funds through Project Recovery. A program which assisted individuals and households through funding to help them get back on their feet. During this time though small businesses were also struggling to find a helping hand financially to help recover their businesses. Thanks to a generous donation from a donor, Couleecap was able to grant funds to small businesses like B and E Trees to help recover their lost infrastructure and keep the dream of their small business alive.

Though the adversity they have been presented Bree and Eric have continued to grow their business. Now in 2023 they are shifting their brand to Embark Maple and are beginning to expand on their line of good energy for adventurous folks like themselves. The farm where the maple syrup is produced will continue to be known as B & E Trees and they will continue to produce their bourbon barrel aged syrup as well; but have now expanded their company to not only an expanded employee base but also to feature their maple syrup energy pouches for syrup enthusiasts and adventurers alike.

“Embark Maple, formerly B&E’s Trees, is launching Maple Energy- a new athletic energy from simple, clean, organic ingredients. Maple syrup naturally provides the performance nutrition needed by endurance athletes, with none of the synthetic ingredients, flavors or textures found in commercial gels. A pinch of sea salt completes the electrolyte profile, creating a product whose performance is only rivaled by its outstanding flavor. Taken directly from the re-sealable three-ounce pouch, mixed in a water bottle for a hydration boost, or used in cooking and cocktails at camp or in the kitchen, Embark Maple invites everyone to the adventure,” notes their website on their newest product and name. “Of the name change, Bree says, ‘B&E’s Trees is a great description- me, Eric, and our trees, but it was sometimes confusing. People thought we were beekeepers or grew Christmas trees. And spelling out our website was always a challenge. Embark embodies the hope and excitement at the center of our business.’” The delightful product currently comes in three flavor profiles, Salted Maple Syrup, Coffee and Elderberry.

They have also continued to include opportunities for the community to engage in their love of the woods, adventure, and maple syrup as well. One of these opportunities will be happening on March 18 during the Sap Run Scramble. The 5K adventure is hosted at B&E’s Farm in rural Cashton and promises quite an array of fun. Participants will have the opportunity to see Embark Maple being made, there will be snack stops every kilometer, of the 5K hike/run through the woods as well as maple themed drinks, samples, in addition to delightful food and good ole fun. The 5K starts at noon and the cost is \$25 for adults and \$10 for youths with 10 and under free. Information about the event and Embark as well can be found at www.embarkmaple.com.

