



Bigelow Tea turns 65 as seen in World Tea News!!

World Tea News.com Q&A article with Cindi Bigelow

Bigelow CEO on
Turning 65



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by Heidi Kyser

Cindi Bigelow is no sexagenarian, but the family-owned company she runs is. On the occasion of Bigelow Tea's 65th anniversary, World Tea News Editor Heidi Kyser talked with the CEO about how the company has aged since her grandmother, Ruth Campbell Bigelow, started the business in 1945.

WTN: What's it like turning 65?

Bigelow: We really are excited. In addition to being our 65th anniversary, we're having our best year ever.

WTN: In terms of what?

Bigelow: We're expecting 10 to 12 percent growth this year. We're introducing a lot of exciting new products, working very closely with the channels we're in, getting into channels we've not been in historically, learning what the needs of those channels are and establishing strong relationships in them.

WTN: How will you do that?

Bigelow: There's a lot of the neat marketing stuff we've been doing. We've really had a successful run the last few years, and we're planning to build on that.

WTN: Are you referring to all the online, social media and video activity I've been seeing lately?

Bigelow: Yes, all those things. It's really been working well for us. We don't have a ton of money to put into marketing like some of the huge companies out there. We're a small, family-owned company, and we put a very high percentage of our budget into product development and packaging, making sure that we put the best quality product out there.

WTN: How big is Bigelow?

Bigelow: We have 330 families that work for us.

WTN: How many facilities?

Bigelow: We have three: one in Boise, Idaho, Louisville, Ky., and Fairfield, Conn. We also have the

plantation in (Charleston) South Carolina and a small facility in Bridgeport that does our direct marketing.

WTN: Any plans to take the company public?

Bigelow: Never in a million, zillion years.

WTN: Why?

Bigelow: Why would I? We are so committed to this business, so committed to the product, the consumer and the employee. As soon as you bring somebody else in, that focus changes. They'd propose things that we don't feel are good for the family long-term. Their concern is profit; our main concern is our people and our product.

WTN: What about the potential financial benefit?

Bigelow: I don't mind losing money and making mistakes if I think it's right in the long-term. Once you invite someone from the outside, they're going to think differently. Right now, I don't have to think quarter to quarter, and act quarter to quarter, and I don't want to. I can look at an entire year, and I can get creative if I need to. If I have to do that, my employees understand, but investors wouldn't.

WTN: Do you have any special plans for this anniversary year?

Bigelow: We'll be staying focused on our products. We just recently introduced our Herb Plus line, our Canadian line, our RTD line – we'll be expanding that. We're going to continue to drive and push our businesses very hard.

WTN: No celebration?

Bigelow: In June, in all our locations except the plantation and the Bridgeport facility, we're going to have 65-year birthday parties and that include all the employees. We'll have some special fun with that.

WTN: Anything for customers?

Bigelow: You know, I've seen anniversaries so overplayed with consumers, and I'm not sure it resonates with them. I think what resonates with them is a good cup of tea... Personally, I've never been one to splash all over our boxes "65 years," because as a consumer myself that doesn't mean anything to me. Take Newman's Own salad dressing – a product I love. I just want it to taste really great and be a good value. I don't care if the company is 65 years old this year.

WTN: What's coming around the next bend?

Bigelow: Tea is continuing to resonate with the consumer as a healthy beverage, and I think that's got a lot of legs. We are working on some ideas I can't share with you at this time. I'm very sensitive to trying to create a product that's not just a trend, but good for the long term. I tend not to try to exploit what I consider to be a fad in the industry. If consumers want white tea, we have a white tea, but I try to focus on quality consistent products.

WTN: How do you stay connected to the history of the company your grandmother started 65 years ago?

Bigelow: Well, I was only 6 years old when my grandmother died, so for me, it's really the influence of my parents (David and Eunice Bigelow), who ran it for 45 years. Their core values were 1. quality, 2. the employee and 3. integrity.

Quality is an overused word, I know, but I've been in the company 25 years and it took me 20 of those to understand what quality tea really means. Now I have a great appreciation for the things we do to ensure the quality of our product. ... For instance, we do not use tea dust in any of our teas. So, from the get-go we pay a higher price for our teas. It's the same for our ingredients. We've bought our bergamot from the same garden in Italy for the last 25 years, and that's what makes our Earl Grey stand out. I get that commitment to quality from my mother and father.