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Sonoma County businesses join national titans in raising awareness of breast cancer



Santa Rosa-based La Tortilla Factory is selling its low carb tortillas in pink packaging in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Jenny Tamayo, the digital marketing director, said the company started the packaging after her aunt Darlene Tamayo was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011.

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Amid similar efforts by large corporations and sports leagues, Sonoma County businesses — some motivated by their founders' experiences — are working to raise awareness of breast cancer and raise money to find a cure for the disease by promoting pink products.

That's the case at Santa Rosa-based La Tortilla Factory, which this month is manufacturing a limited edition of its High Fiber Low Carb Tortillas in pink packaging. The company donates 25 cents to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation for every package sold.

The company donated \$50,000 during last year's campaign.

The effort was spurred in part by the battle of Darlene Tamayo — the wife of La Tortilla Factory co-founder Willie Tamayo — who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011. But after a lumpectomy and 33 radiation treatments, Tamayo is cancer-free.

Tamayo said in an interview that she is a “pretty private person,” but when the marketing department came to her last year with the project, she saw no downside, especially to highlight the importance of an annual mammogram.

Tamayo’s story is told on the back of the wrapper as well on the company’s website and social media channels.

“My story is simple, and so far it has had a happy ending,” Tamayo said. “I had a mother who had breast cancer ... so I was super paranoid about it.”

But La Tortilla’s efforts don’t stop with cutting a check. It also hosted with Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa free breast self-examination classes for all of its 300 employees, in Spanish and English.

“They did a great job, and we had a great turnout,” said Jenny Tamayo, La Tortilla’s digital marketing director and Darlene’s niece. “Not only did we learn a lot, it also provided a platform for employees to share their stories.”

Other local businesses are getting involved as well. Russian River Brewing Co. serves up Framboise for the Cure, a sour blonde ale that contains 30 pounds of raspberries per barrel to turn it pinkish-red. Russian River raised more than \$100,000 from its efforts last year.

Wineries also are part of the effort. Chateau St. Jean in Sonoma will donate \$1 to breast cancer charities for every bottle sold in October. It also launched its Notes of Hope program with singer and breast cancer survivor Sheryl Crow, allowing customers and fans to share an inspirational digital message with friends and family, and to access recipes and wine pairings as well as a chance to win tickets to a Crow concert.

The trend of involvement in breast cancer awareness among North Coast businesses comes as the disease has taken on additional prominence in recent years in national marketing and advertising efforts, notably by the National Football League, said Rich Campbell, a marketing professor at Sonoma State University who specialized in sports marketing.

During NFL games, players sport pink gloves and shoes, and referees even once threw pink penalty flags — a vibrant color in stark contrast with a business noted for its masculinity and hard hits.

“It’s a cultural touchstone. Even people who don’t follow the NFL know about the NFL and its efforts,” Campbell said. “Individual companies see this as an opportunity. You don’t need to be the NFL to help integrate this into your business.”

He noted the NFL’s effort, which has raised \$7 million for the American Cancer Society through its pink merchandise, also helps to cultivate female viewers and fans.

At La Tortilla, the pink outreach also helps to emphasize its commitment to healthy eating, said Sam Tamayo, vice chairman of the company and chief innovation officer. The company was at the forefront of offering low-carbohydrate and fat-free wraps and tortillas, he said.

Sam Tamayo said the high- fiber, low-carb tortilla was an easy pick for the pink packaging.

“It is one of our top three products,” he said. “We get so much feedback from consumers and how it fits their healthy lifestyle. It makes so much sense that we picked it.”

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