

The Coffee Bean

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

Once upon a time, Kaldi, an Ethiopian goat herder, noticed his goats dancing with unusual fervor after eating the red fruit of the coffee shrub. He tried some beans himself, and he too, had more pep in his step. He shared the discovery with some local monks and they tried boiling the bean and drinking the result, and then noticed they were unable to sleep that night. Coffee and humans have been intertwined ever since.



GLORIA JEAN KVETKO (RIGHT)
With Joni Shunia of Joni's Pizza — one of Long Grove's current female entrepreneurs.

America got its first commercial coffee roaster in 1793. Beans were hard to come by and expensive, so coffee was really only something for the wealthy elite. The advent of steamships improved the supply and quality and brought the price down to something most people could afford. After World War II, production in Central America boomed, and by the 1950's, coffee was an everyday staple in homes throughout the country.

Maybe you're like me and remember coffee coming in those big red tins with name brands like Hills Brothers. While this was, no doubt, an efficient way of getting coffee consumed by the masses, it wasn't the tastiest end product. By the late 1970's, a space in the market was opening up for specialty and gourmet offerings.



In our neck of the woods, there was a young enterprising mom from a gritty Chicago neighborhood, busy with her successful beauty parlor, but chasing her dream of a custom home. She had acquired a lot in Long Grove, and as her savings accumulated, the idea of opening a second business in the quaint little town of Long Grove became a passion. Back then, there were no available store fronts, and if you wanted a store, you had to grab one the moment someone decided to close up shop. The first one to come available for our young mom was the Coffee Bean. It was located across from Red Oaks in what had been a garage. The little shop sold antiques and coffee beans. The antiques were sold off and coffee beans and the trappings to grind and brew them became the sole focus. For variety, she started making her own flavored beans, which was unheard of at the time.

She was on to something – people were buying it, and the word spread. Woodfield mall called asking for her to open a store. Then Northbrook court called. Then Randhurst mall. This was big. For legal purposes, Coffee Bean was too common a name, so the lawyer suggested the prefix it with their own name. Her husband Ed suggested Ed's Coffee Bean, but the young mom's middle name was Jean and that rhymed with bean, so Gloria Jean's Coffee Bean it was. Over the next dozen years, well over a hundred stores opened around the country. Long Grove resident Gloria Kvetko had turned Gloria Jean's Coffee Bean into the most recognized coffee franchise in America.

In 1993, an offer she couldn't refuse for the company was put forth, and, somewhat reluctantly, she sold her coffee empire in 1993. The new owners eventually ran into difficulty, but the brand remained strong and positive, and today, under new owners yet again, it's making a comeback.

The little Long Grove garage that was store #1 was sold as well. The new owner Karen Krahn, re-named it Beans and Leaves. A couple of years ago the store was acquired by Ethel Berger. Ethel has recently started working with the Long Grove Confectionary to create a new coffee shop next to Towner Green, to be called The Long Grove Coffee Company. A new company is moving into the little garage that Ethel vacated and will offer coffee and ice cream. The name Covered Bridge Creamery will now adorn the little garage.

Gloria Jean is happy to share her experiences and did so recently with a group of downtown merchants. Pictured is Gloria Jean with one of Long Grove's current female entrepreneurs, Joni Shunia, of Joni's Pizza. While Joni currently doesn't have any national expansion plans, you never know. Perhaps you should grab a slice now, so you'll have bragging rights if Joni's Pizza ever becomes the household word that Gloria Jean's Coffee Bean did.

This month's Save the Bridge limerick is a nod to that magical power that beckoned Gloria Jean to choose Long Grove to launch her business:

SAVE THE BRIDGE • NO. 6

*The old bridge over Buffalo Creek
Is what makes our town unique
It's the history
And the mystery
And the charm that customers seek*