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# BUSINESS REPORT

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## CUP OF COLORADO

*Stassen expands  
to meet exploding  
demand for teas*

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**GUNBARREL** — It might just be your cup of tea. At least that's what the people at Stassen North America Company in Boulder are hoping.

"A cup of tea is the friendliest, fuzziest thing you can put in your body," says Barry Cooper, co-owner of Stassen North America, a private-label tea and herb packaging and processing company. "Tea as a gift is the most wonderful gift."

### *Healthy product*

It also seems to be the most wonderful product for Stassen. To accommodate its rapid growth, the company moved on Dec. 1 to a new 6,500-square-foot facility in Gunbarrel where workers do product development, sales, marketing and quality control.

"The whole tea market is just exploding," said Cooper, who has worked around tea all his life. The explosion, he contends, comes from people recognizing the health benefits of herbs and herbal teas and the desire to find alternatives to conventional medicine. The company has not limited itself to herb teas, but also sells bulk herbs and a wide variety of black tea blends.

Cooper's long history with tea began in Kenya in east Africa where he grew up. His father raised cattle. The family's ranch bor-



KATHLEEN KELLY

*Barry Cooper, co-owner of Stassen North America tea company, first became a tea-taster for Lipton in 1965. Today the company imports 26,000 tons of tea from Ceylon.*

dered a tea estate or plantation.

"The son of the owner of the tea estate and I became good friends. He went into the tea business, eventually working for Lipton in London," said Cooper. "I studied law, but gave it up, so my friend told me to apply for a job at Lipton. The chairman asked to see me during my interview and

it turns out he had dated my aunt, so I got the job," he laughed, adding that he thought the chairman still had a crush on his aunt.

"I started out working for Lipton in 1965 in London, and I became a tea taster," said Cooper. Tea tasting, he said, is very dif-

*continued on page 38*

# Stassen's tea sales quadrupled over last five years

*continued from page 3*

ficult. Most people change professions because it is a very intense use of the senses and takes a lot of concentration. "It is hard to use your senses for that period of time, but I loved it."

## *'Broader horizons'*

After 33 years Cooper is now a master tea taster and can identify teas and blends from all over the world.

Cooper went to work for Celestial Seasonings in 1988, where he did a lot of tea tasting. By 1991, he was vice president of research and development at Celestial and thinking about reaching out on his own. "I left Celestial in 1992 because I had broader horizons," Cooper said. "It was an amiable departure, and I still own stock in the company."

Stassen has 10 employees at the Boulder facility and owns 55 tea estates in Ceylon. Tea is very sensitive to prolonged storage and can lose flavor, so all Stassen tea is

packed and packaged at or near the tea estate sites.

"We blend everything overseas, so we have the advantage of having the most incredibly fresh tea," Cooper said. "The U.S. imports 90,000 metric tons of tea a year, and we at Stassen import 26,000 tons of tea from Ceylon. We are a major factor in the Ceylon tea market — we are one of the top two exporters of their tea."

Colorful artwork used on the packaging is designed by U.S. artists and artists from other countries.

"Stassen is a partner with Stassen Exports Ltd. in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The core business is private label tea packing, but we recently expanded to some private label teas," said Kerry Ostholthoff, director of sales and operations. "We ship tea all over the world. Russia is a big market for us."

The company has two lines of tea on the market commercially known as Cup of Colorado and Cup of San Francisco. The Colorado line, sold in this state, includes Aspen Afternoon Tea, Boulder Berry, Mile High Tea and Rocky Moun-

tain Raspberry. Except for raspberry, all the teas in this line are black teas. It is sold in boxes of 10 bags for \$1.99 to \$3.50 or four packs for \$7 to \$10 for 40 tea bags.

## *City scenes*

"We will continue to expand the 'cup of' line," said Ostholthoff. "We will launch the Cup of London and the Cup of Capetown next year. We will have artists from those areas create scenes of London and Capetown that we will use on the packaging."

The company is developing a line of herbal teas for the bath called Herbal Bath Pleasures, which will be on the market in 1998.

Ostholthoff said that about 40 percent of the company's business is black tea, about 60 percent of its business is in bulk herbs and herb teas. The company's sales have quadrupled in the last five years.

"The specialty teas and wellness teas are the fastest part of the business," Ostholthoff said. "I attribute the rapid growth to the (baby)-

boomers. They want to turn to non-traditional methods for feeling good. And many people are interested in reducing their caffeine intake."

Stassen has a manufacturing operation in Thailand where it gets hibiscus, lemon grass and some cinnamon, Ostholthoff said. In Oregon, the company gets peppermint, spearmint. From Sri Lanka comes cinnamon, cloves, pepper and black tea. The tea is packed in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

If you ask Cooper about his favorite tea, he gives a little laugh.

"My favorite tea comes from a certain area of Ceylon. It is called Neura Eliya. My personal favorite is called Lover's Leap. At certain times of the year the tea gets a slightly lemony taste," said Cooper. The tea is not imported because there is such a small quantity available. "But I have friends who send me some."

Cooper has been called a Sean Connery look-alike by his staff. And he admits that people in airports often mistake him for the actor. His British accent adds to the confusion.