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By Roy Fuchs

Kerry Wood Healthy Foods is a brand you may not be familiar with. You should be. Ms. Wood, a Westporter, an entrepreneur and a transplanted New Orleans foodie, created this premium salad dressing brand.

Speaking to Westport Sunrise Rotary on Friday, Ms. Wood introduced herself as a restaurant aficionado from New Orleans and a music promoter. She said she came to New York to promote bands such as Bon Jovi for PolyGram — a job that required spending a lot of time in her car driving from radio station to radio station seeking air play for her artists.

By the mid-90s digital recordings, the Internet, then the iPod were eroding one-to-one promotion. Once the iTunes Store legitimized single-song downloads, the Internet replaced radio play as the driver of hits — and so impacted her career.

“What’s next?” she asked. Could she make her interest in health and nutrition into a new career? And could she do it as the economy headed south in 2008? The answer began in her kitchen. She blended pure olive oil and other fresh ingredients — but no gluten, no added sugar, artificial additives or preservatives — to make a no compromises premium Taste of Tuscany salad dressing. Looking for her first customers, she went to Westport’s Whole Foods farmers’ market. The first time out, Ms. Wood sold over 70 bottles, the next time over 100. Her self-appointed “focus groups” made a singular comment — “it tastes like homemade dressing.”

Even this level of sales was too much for long-term home production. With the capacity of a New Haven co-packer, Ms. Wood got placement inside Westport’s Whole Foods.

But lacking a track record to expand to any of their other locations, she returned to what she had done for 17 years, promoting her artists — she drove from location to location and demoed her product. First Greenwich, ultimately 10 Whole Foods markets. At each stop she found the same receptive shoppers.

Today Kerry Wood Healthy Dressings — in Taste of Tuscany as well as Balsamic Vinaigrette, Lemon and Ginger flavors — can be found in the refrigerated section of the produce department in over 20 area Whole Foods stores.

A Stew Leonard’s buyer sampled her dressing at the farmers market and invited Ms. Wood to do demos in the Norwalk store. Today she sells over 1,000 bottles a week in all four Stew’s stores.

She took on a specialty foods distributor that makes Kerry Wood Healthy Dressings available on Long Island, in New York City, Westchester County and northern New Jersey, and opened the door to Stop & Shop and Fairway markets.

These dressings can also be purchased in the Organic Market in Westport and many similar local health food stores in Fairfield County.

If you want the taste of home made without the work, Kerry Wood Healthy Dressings are for you. To learn more, link to <http://kwhealthyfoods.com/>.