



PHOTOS BY JIEUN LEE

BREWING UP BUSINESS



“I WAS DEFINITELY OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE at first in Seoul,” said Tiffany Needham '01. “I came to visit my parents, thinking I’d stay for a while and then go back to New York. But, I stayed, and I have a full, interesting life here now.”

Needham’s mother is Korean, and her parents live in Korea on a military assignment. She doesn’t speak the language fluently, but, along with her boyfriend Erik Moynihan, a Canadian expatriate, has established a small but growing business.

“The social rules I grew up with don’t apply here. I don’t have the usual pressure to graduate from college, get married and have children. I’m free to explore my interests,” she said.

And, her interests were varied. For the first few years, Needham taught English part time, primarily to adult learners. She met Erik, who was also teaching English. Together, over the past five years, they have dabbled in several ventures — an online magazine and a TV show about living abroad, a website that offered the lesson plans they’d developed for their students, a quality men’s clothing store, and a craft brewery.

Some of the ventures failed, some enjoyed moderate success but ended, and some have been economically successful as well as life-enriching.





Their business ventures all seemed to gather momentum at about the same time, forcing them to leave their teaching positions to focus on turning their hobbies into businesses.

“The longer we lived in Seoul and the more business ideas we tried, the smarter we became about the culture and what the people wanted,” said Needham.

The couple had enjoyed craft beers in the United States, and could find nothing similar in Seoul.

“There are two main breweries in Korea and they both make a very light lager,” Needham explained. “So, we took a home-brewing class and bought a kit. We actually bought the wrong kit — instead of a beginner’s extract kit we bought an all-grain kit. So, it was a bit more difficult, but we had beginner’s luck and brewed a good-tasting brown ale!”

Friends enjoyed the beer as well, and began to ask the couple to bring it to parties, and even to sell it to them. Realizing that this hobby fulfilled a market need and could be successful, the couple bought more equipment and explored working with larger brewers who had distribution licenses. Magpie Brewery was born.

They renovated their store front brewing space to the Brew Shop, and opened a casual, rustic bar called Magpie Basement. The brewing is now done at a commercial brewery under the close supervision of the four co-owners of Magpie Brewing Company.

Magpie Brewing developed quickly into a successful business. “We have added staff, and besides selling our beer at our store and bar, it is available at 16 bars in the area and we have a waiting list of 30 or more who want to carry it,” she said.

“We are also finding that our customer base is changing. It’s not just our neighbors anymore. People are coming from all areas of Seoul. In Korea, people primarily drink Soju, a distilled liquor similar to vodka. There are also basic beers that are popular, but wine is something you would order only in a very nice restaurant. The interest in craft beers is very high now,” Needham explained.

The couple is recognized not only for their craft beers, but also became local celebrities through their television series on a local station. “It’s similar to a local PBS channel,” said Needham. “We interviewed other expatriates about their lives in Seoul. We really enjoyed it, and although we won’t be doing a second season, we are hoping to do another show that is focused on craft beers.” The clothing store that Erik and friends started is also doing well. “Erik started Decade at the same time as Magpie was taking off. Beer was easier to sell than clothing, so he focused on getting Magpie off the ground, while maintaining Decade as a small shop. But, now he and his co-owners have other investors and are able to add a second location. The concept of Decade is quality clothes that, if properly cared for, should last at least 10 years. The store offers European and North American



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clothing of high quality. For people in their 20s and 30s the idea of investing in classic, long-lasting clothing is new to this region. Young people mainly buy what’s new or trendy,” she said.

“When I think back on my years at Ravenscroft, I realize that I can attribute some of my success as a businesswoman to opportunities I had there and to people who influenced me.

“I played soccer for a few years and ran track for a year, which I’m sure taught me about teamwork and being committed to a common goal. But the freedom I had to participate in different extracurricular activities really broadened my horizons and gave me the skills to work with different people. I was in Key Club and on the yearbook staff, and other clubs. I was able to really think, ‘what experience do I want to have’ and then have it,” she said.

“And now that I am a boss — a female business owner in a different country, I reach back and model the strength and leadership skills of my English teacher, Mrs. [Sharon] Beineke, and my gym teacher, Mrs. [Cherie] Fowler.”

“Mrs. Beineke was an absolute lady. She was always so put-together and really paid attention to every detail. She knew how to carry herself, and I’m trying to do the same. And, she had high expectations for us, always pushing us to act our best,” she said. *R*

Erik Moynihan, owner of Decade clothing store in Seoul

