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*Just out of high school, Arlo Shirk and his Dad Edward purchased the Caramel Crisp Shop in 1937. Their redskin peanuts were what kept the customers coming back again and again.*



## ... a Family-Owned Business with a Catchy Name

*By Darbi Durham, Director of Communication and Advocacy  
Illinois Chamber of Commerce*

It all started with a corner shop and a family name. Illinois Chamber member BEER NUTS® Brand Snacks began in 1937 when Arlo Shirk purchased the Caramel Crisp Shop in Bloomington, IL right out of high school. The Caramel Shop was known locally for their caramel apples, caramel corn, and orange drink but their redskin peanuts were what really kept customers coming back again and again.

At age 22, Russell Shirk was called to take over the Caramel Crisp Shop following the tragic death of his brother, Arlo. Russell began quickly managing and expanding the shop. Russell partnered with potato-chip distributor Eldredge Brewster to sell “Shirk’s Glazed Peanuts.” Following years of thinking about ways to expand the brand, Russell and Eldredge launched the product BEER NUTS Original Peanuts, which quickly be-

came a staple in bars across the land.

Andy Shirk, President of BEER NUTS began his career path by doing the jobs nobody else wanted: sweeping the plant, breaking down boxes, digging dirt, etc. It was these character-building tasks that brought Andy back to BEER NUTS after pursuing a real estate career selling shopping centers that ended with the lending crash in 2008. “Nobody’s too good to do any job. It builds character,” said Shirk.

As we know BEER NUTS® Brand Snacks today, the business only continues to grow. While we know the pandemic brought a lot of uncertainty to businesses all around, “BEER NUTS was very fortunate that a significant portion of the population was spending a lot of time at home, drinking beer and appropriately, snacking on BEER NUTS products,” said Shirk. During

the pandemic, BEER NUTS saw the costs of supplies rise, as well as overtime, due to the need for essential cleaning supplies for around the office and common areas, with additional expenses for PPE. Not only that, but the work from home shifts created a challenge for maintaining and improving culture while limiting face to face interaction. “We’ve made substantial progress over the past decade and are gearing up to accelerate that growth in the near future.” With the struggles of the global pandemic, BEER NUTS still continues to produce all BEER NUTS® Brand Snacks through their 100,000 square-foot facility in Bloomington, IL.

Still family owned, and still using the same secret recipe, BEER NUTS Bar Mix with Wasabi is the company’s most recent product and a fan favorite, too. “The mix of our Original Bar Mix with an added Wasabi flavor, without the overwhelming nostril piercing spiciness is my new favorite,” said Shirk. BEER NUTS will soon release two additional mix variations that are bound to be well liked and will extend their offering. BEER NUTS recently brought back their ‘throwback’ packaging that is getting a lot of attention and can be found on their website BEERNUTS.com. The company has 18 different product varieties to choose from, ranging from



those you see in the grocery store, to others not widely distributed. “My favorites right now are our Macadamias and our Sweet Cheezus.”

Finding ways to help BEER NUTS with representation from Chicago to Springfield and statewide, the Illinois Chamber of Commerce has helped navigate opportunities and challenges running a business in Illinois offers. “As we focus our time and efforts on growing our business, we appreciate the Chamber team lobbying on behalf of the business community on issues that make Illinois a more attractive place to build our business, especially in regard to fiscal responsibility,” said Shirk.

With a catchy name, family-owned business, and smart distribution, word got out. And over a half-century later, the Shirks are continually developing new products to distribute across the land and will never cease to expand the family tradition. Thank you, BEER NUTS® for allowing Illinois to be your home.



*Andy Shirk is the President of Beer Nuts, starting out doing a little bit of everything at a young age.*

*Today, Beer Nuts continues to grow and develop new products to keep their customers happy.*

