



the RISING Eventide

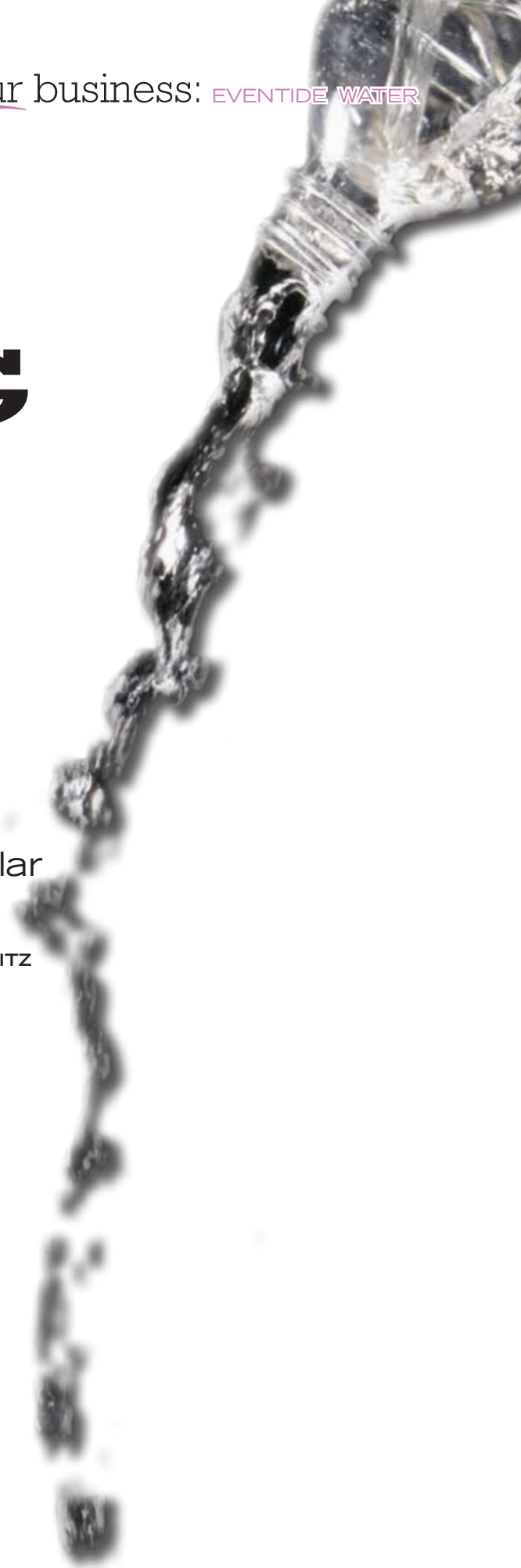
A Millsap resident turns his son's discovery into a nearly million-dollar bottled water business.

BY MARICE RICHTER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN STANKEWITZ

The bottled water market is overflowing with products, ranging from upscale imports from France and the Fiji Islands to widely available low-cost generic varieties.

But competition hasn't prevented a homegrown start-up company from wading into the crowded marketplace. Eventide Natural Spring Water, a product of Parker County natural springs, hasn't just found its niche; it's making a splash across the country.

In just over three years, the company has gone from a fledgling start-up to nearly a million-dollar venture. And new growth opportunities continue to flow in. Eventide is now available in 180 H-E-B grocery stores in Central and South Texas as well as retail stores in the Parker County area, including seven local Wal-Mart stores.





“There is a niche in the market for high-quality, high-caliber water that is priced between the high end and the economy end.”

— Eventide president Mike Putnam

This fall, Eventide is making its national debut through sales at Schlotzky’s restaurants. A debut in the Dallas-Fort Worth market could be close behind.

Eventide founder Jeff Parker attributes the company’s success to some smart business decisions, but its establishment was more a matter of serendipity.

“A lot has happened very quickly, and we feel very fortunate,” Parker says. “But I also feel that it was just meant to be. God gave us something, and we chose to do something positive with it.”

Parker remembers the day his youngest son made a fateful discovery on

the family’s land. About seven years ago, Parker’s teenage son Spencer ventured out on a cold winter day to explore some remote parts of the 60-acre farm in Millsap.

“He comes rushing in to tell me he found a dead deer and a bunch of water,” Parker recalls. Despite Spencer’s prodding, Parker was not budging from his cozy spot in front of the fireplace. Several months passed before father and son finally went back to look at Spencer’s findings.

They found the water, but locating the source required some digging and clearing of overgrown foliage and debris. They were near an old stone structure, which was an abutment of the abandoned Brannon Bridge, which was once a crossing for the Brazos River.

Finally, they discovered the water was coming from a fissure in a limestone outcropping near the Brazos River, which crosses the property.

Although the Parkers were unaware of the spring, evidence suggests that early settlers and American Indians clearly knew of the water source. Soot on the limestone boulders near the spring indicates that campfires were created near the spring, says company president Mike Putnam.

Parker had long known of another spring on the property and had cobbled together a rudimentary system to pipe the fresh, natural water to the house for the family’s use.

With the discovery of this second spring, Parker felt he was given a sign not to let this water just flow away.

But Parker, a long-time English teacher and coach at Mineral Wells High School, had no business experience and wasn’t sure what to do. First, he contacted a major marketer of bottled water. The company tested the water



and was apparently very impressed with the taste and quality, Parker says.

“All they wanted to do was buy the springs,” he says. “That’s when we knew for sure we had something really good here. If it was a good investment for them, I knew it would be a good investment for us.” Parker did his homework and developed a business plan anchored around building a bottling plant on site. He lined up financing through a group of local investors—Kirk Horton and family and Mark Harrington and

working in the warehouse to delivering water,” says Spencer, 22. “I want to stay involved because I found the main spring where we get the bulk of the water. I’m honored that the springs are named after me, but I try to stay humble about it,” he says.

Business started slowly as Eventide tried to market its product to local retailers. But all that changed when the company secured a contract with the H-E-B grocery chain a year ago. A few months later, Parker hired Putnam, a former Wal-Mart executive, to run the company. Since Putman’s arrival in January, Eventide has slid into unimaginable success, with the addition of Wal-Mart and more H-E-B stores.



“There is a niche in the market for high-quality, high-caliber water that is priced between the high end and the economy end,” Putnam says, referring to the fresh taste and all-natural content of the water. “That’s where we have come in.”

Eventide sells for \$5.48 for a 24-pack of 20-ounce bottles at Wal-Mart.

“You can definitely taste a difference from other bottled water,” says Peggy Hutton, director of development for the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce, which now includes Eventide in its membership. “It’s becoming more and more popular.”

Eventide also appeals to the growing market of eco-consumers drawn to natural products that have no additives or preservatives, he says.

Eventide now has 15 employees and draws about 80,000 gallons a day from the two springs – a fraction of the amount available, Parker says. Parker retired from teaching and coaching in June and is now vice-president of sales.

Besides being successful, the company strives to be a good community patron. In October, it partnered with

Eventide founder, Jeff Parker



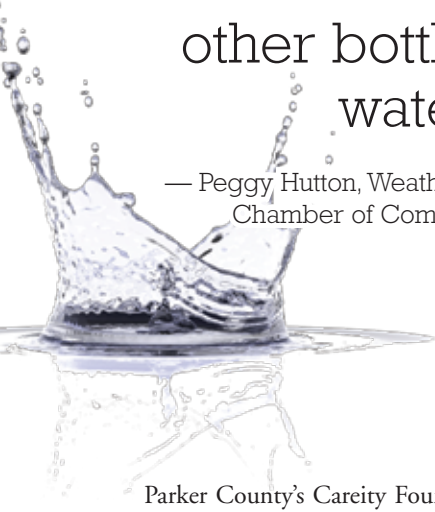
family, both of Mineral Wells—obtained state certification and built a multimillion-dollar bottling facility in the middle of a peanut field on the Millsap property, Parker says.

In 2006, Eventide opened for business, drawing water from the two springs. Parker named both Spencer Springs in honor of the son’s discovery. Spencer, a student at Weatherford College, is the only one of Parker’s three children who works for the company. He plans to continue helping out part-time even after finishing his studies to become a firefighter and paramedic.

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Parker County’s Careity Foundation to support breast-cancer prevention and awareness. Eventide bottles sported pink labels and lids throughout the month, and a portion of the company’s sales were donated to the foundation.

The company also supported *Extreme Home Makeover* in DeSoto last summer by providing free water for the volunteers and workers. The company also has been involved with the Peach Festival and local youth sports teams in Parker County.

In turn, local businesses have been eager to help build Eventide’s success.

“It’s good, it’s cheap, and it’s local,” says Arnold Garrett, owner of a Millsap construction company. “I buy a lot of it for my workers.”

Evon Markum, vice president of marketing for First National Bank, Weatherford, says she buys the bank’s giveaway water bottles from Eventide.

“We switched providers because we want to support business in Parker County,” she says. “Not only was it a good thing to do, it’s a great product.” 🍷