



But RunTex has also been one of the most philanthropic entities to non-profits and small businesses alike. You may not realize it, but most of the Austin running industry today either got its start because of Carrozza, or at one point worked directly for him.

All the while, Carrozza has been a charismatic and magnanimous ambassador for Austin running, watching the seeds he planted grow into the vibrant, active community we enjoy today.

"What we do at RunTex is democratize national caliber world-class training, and bring it to everybody," he says. "We found the more that we coached every day runners, people who weren't even runners yet, like we trained ourselves, that they improved not only themselves but competitively."



NEWLY DESIGNED BOTTLE
Check out the story behind your favorite flavor on the back.



Sweet Leaf Tea

Clayton Christopher & David Smith (sweetleatetea.com)

If you've ever been to a music festival or a triathlon in Austin, chances are you've seen people sipping on colorful bottles with a cartoon grandma smiling on the label. That infectious grin belongs to "Mimi," the entrepreneurial inspiration for her grandson, Clayton Christopher, who has since taken Texas' love for sweet tea down a healthy path.

The beginning years of Sweet Leaf Tea weren't all smiles, however. Christopher and his business partner David Smith had a foray into the tea trade that proved more than a little rough.

They started by brewing their tea in pillowcases, literally filling each plastic bottle by hand. While their product was extremely fresh, they discovered it was also very perishable, spoiling only after a couple of weeks, and oftentimes upon delivery. After three years of trying to keep up with Mother Nature's expiration date, Sweet Leaf Tea was forced to shut down their operation in Beaumont, Texas.

"It was tough," says Smith. "But the good thing was that we knew if we made a slight adjustment to our process, we could get back on track."

Fortunately, the adjustment didn't take long. A six-month hiatus to regroup and tweak their business model gave the operation new life, and a great-tasting product with an extended shelf-life. While it wasn't an insurmountable challenge, it proved an exercise in humility which had lasting impressions.

"For one, we learned that problems are often blessings in disguise," says Christopher. "They're opportunities to pivot and move in a different direction. We also discovered that if you get a big head in this business, it's likely to get knocked off."

All along, Sweet Leaf's dedication to quality and a commitment to its core values have been in check, and not surprisingly, integral to their success. Case

in point: for years Christopher and Smith were urged by industry insiders to replace organic cane sugar and honey in their teas with cheaper, more manufacturer-friendly high-fructose corn syrup. The problem was that it violated the company's mission of using fresh, natural ingredients. So today, after more than a decade of manufacturing their teas, all of Sweet Leaf's non-diet flavors are certified organic by the USDA and made exclusively with natural, non-modified sweeteners (despite a 25 percent increase in cost).

"The only time you ever wash tea is when you brew it, so it's really important for tea to be completely free of pesticides or other chemicals," explains Christopher. "This is why being organic is such a critical thing."

From humble beginnings more than 11 years ago, the company is now a national enterprise with more than 50 employees and distribution in all 50 states. They're a highly recognizable sponsor of local events and a benefactor to local charities as well, including Big Brothers Big Sisters and Susan G. Komen.

"As a business, we're definitely more of a teenager now," explains Christopher. "The little things don't beat us up as badly, we're tougher and able to take things in stride. And honestly, a work day is just as fun as any other day for us; I think our culture here reflects that."



Christopher goes back and forth between Sweet Leaf's Half & Half Lemonade Tea and the Mint and Honey Green Tea.



Smith is a big fan of one of Sweet Leaf's newest flavors, Mango Green Tea, for its fruity taste and natural antioxidants.