

A spiritual brew

by JUSTIN BEDDALL
Staff Reporter

Martha Bowen makes a spiritual cup of coffee.

The organic Arabica beans she sells are grown by Arhuaco Indians in Northern Columbia. The indigenous farmers, following age-old ancestral traditions, actually bless the beans when they are put into the ground and later have a spiritual ceremony during harvest.

"These beans are spiritual," explained Bowen, a native of Columbia who now calls West Vancouver home.

Bowen, who studied hotel management in Switzerland, had an organic epiphany one day while she was working at Capers in West Vancouver as food service manager a few years ago.

There she was standing in a store surrounded by organic products grown around the world — why not organic Colombian coffee?

She contacted the trade commission officer in Toronto and began to cultivate a business plan with her husband Frank. She returned to Columbia and visited her family's roots in the northern part of the country.

There, they met with a group of indigenous farms and spoke about cultivating organic coffee.

"This is going to be the first product we are going to launch," she thought to herself of the beans grown in the Coastal Peak region.

Her company's first coffee product is called Coastal Peak, named after the geographical region the beans are harvested. The Aribaca beans, she explained, are shade grown and hand-picked. And the coffee is sweet and rich and smooth.

"Organic farming is very new," she said, noting that lack of resources is one of the major factors why Colombian farmers haven't started to cultivate organic products sooner. The Coastal Peak region, she notes, is just



Rob Newell photo

THAT OTHER COLUMBIAN IMPORT – Latin Organics Director Martha Bowen with V.P. of Sales and Marketing Frank Rodriguez at their home in Horseshoe Bay.

one of several different areas in the country that is ideal for growing beans — all with unique qualities. (Just like France's wine-growing

"We feel obligated to helping people back home," she said.

And she thinks that once people try her coffee they will want a second cup.

Just ask Jimmy Pattison.

During the Christmas holiday season, Bowen sent a package of her coffee, which is 100 per cent organic and Fair Trade, to the businessman who resides in West Vancouver. Pattison replied with card, saying the coffee was excellent.

Even more importantly, he wanted to arrange a meeting with the couple and see about getting the coffee into Urban Fare. ●

Bowen's Colombian coffee is available at Market Place IGA (150 Esplanade W) and Meinhardt Fine Foods (3002 Granville St.). It will also be on the shelves at WholeFoods Market For more information visit latinorganics.com

"We feel obligated to helping people back home."

– Colombian native and West Van resident Martha Bowen

regions, she believes her native home is capable of cultivating a wide-variety of beans.)

Of course, her coffee mission is two-fold. "We're trying to help the Latin America farmers get away from the illegal crop cultivation and into organic ways of farming," she explained.

She would like to make Columbia famous for its beans not its other infamous cash crop — cocaine.

Cubs' fate rests with Alberta: MLA

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They contend there are no licensed grizzly bear rehabilitation and release programs in North America. They also argue North America has no documented cases of successful grizzly bear rehabilitation and reintroduction into the wild.

North Vancouver MLA Katherine Whittred commends the youth for their efforts, but said it's up to Alberta to determine the best place for the cubs.

"All the parties involved agree these cubs are not good candidates for rehabilitation," she said.

"Neither Parks Canada or the Province of Alberta has asked or given permission for

these bears to be sent anywhere."

B.C. Environment Minister Barry Penner has asked his staff to look at B.C. facilities that could provide a permanent home for the bears.

Grouse Mountain took two orphaned grizzlies into care five years ago. The bears live on five acres of land on the mountain top and will never be released into the wild.

Its sister property, Kicking Horse Mountain Grizzly Bear Habitat in Golden B.C., is the largest protected grizzly bear habitat in the world. Only one bear occupies the area.

The ministry has not confirmed whether its looking at either of the Grouse locations as possible homes for the bears. ●