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# LOCAL BUSINESS

## The Palm Beach Post

LOCAL BUSINESS IS OUR BUSINESS

WHY A SMALL  
BOCA COMPANY  
JUST BOUGHT  
**1 MILLION  
FROZEN  
BURRITOS**  
IN BUSINESS



When manufacturers produce too much or mislabel products, they call Marvell.



TAYLOR JONES/Staff Photographer

Marvell Foods owners Marilyn Raybin (left) and Valerie Lovell buy unwanted edibles and sell them to small grocers and others.

## Food traders sell fine-quality castoffs **SUCH-A-DEAL MEALS**

A small Boca Raton company digests profits from a niche market.

By LAURA HAMPSON  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BOCA RATON - A major manufacturer adds a new dinosaur to its box of kids' dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets but still has 100,000 pounds of perfectly fine nuggets in the older boxes.

Most large retailers want only the latest product, and the maker just wants to get the older boxes of nuggets off its hands. So what happens to all that chicken?

With a few phone calls, Marilyn Raybin and Valerie Lovell, owners of Marvell Foods in Boca Raton, buy the nuggets at a discounted price. A day or so later, they've sold them to a small, discount grocery chain and turned a profit.

Since opening in 2007, business has improved for Marvell despite

the economy. "It's not like we are selling diamonds. People have to eat," Raybin said.

Companies are eager to sell unwanted goods to free up cash, and others are willing to buy from a secondary market to save money.

Friends for 15 years, Raybin and Lovell said that while growing up they were expected to marry and have children right away, not develop a career. Now in their 50s, the two have created a multimillion-dollar business in the world of food trading.

When manufacturers produce too much of an item, mislabel a product or decide to change the size or ingredients of an item, they call Marvell. If it's a good deal and a marketable product, Marvell will buy it. Then Raybin, Lovell and their 10 employees work the phones to sell the product to buyers such as small grocery stores, schools,

See MARVELL, 5D ▶



### A Marvell-ous concept

Marvell Foods is a multimillion-dollar business in the world of food trading.

**Seizing opportunity:** After a delivery truck rolls over on the highway, Marvell often buys the cargo from an insurance company at 50 percent to 70 percent of the original value.

**Recent purchase:** About 1 million frozen burritos - that's 25 truckloads - after a convenience store canceled its contract with the manufacturer.

**Who buys from Marvell?** Small grocery stores, smaller convenience stores, schools, universities, prisons, food banks, food service distributors and cruise lines.

**Volume of products sold last year:** 10 million pounds.

**Volume of products expected to sell this year:** At least 20 million pounds.

**Other opportunities:** Marvell Foods also sells 40,000 pounds a month of laundry detergent left over from manufacturing.

**Expansion:** Raybin and Lovell hope to have 20 employees by 2011, double their current workforce.

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## Firm buys, sells in U.S., internationally

▶ MARVELL from 1D

prisons, food banks, food service distributors and cruise lines.

Although they specialize in chicken - their logo features two chickens in pearls and high heels - Marvell also buys and sells beef, pork, fish and pet food ingredients. They said they sold about 10 million pounds, about three truckloads a week, of products last year and expect to sell at least 20 million pounds this year.

Always looking for new opportunities and products, they once bought and then sold an assortment of hats from an embroidering company. They also sell 40,000 pounds a month of laundry detergent, left over from the manufacturing process, to Amish communities.

Recently they bought about 1 million frozen burritos or 25 truckloads, after a convenience store canceled its contract with the manufacturer. Marvell sold the burritos to universities, schools and small convenience stores.

Over on the highway, Marvell often buys the cargo from an insurance company at about 50 percent to 70 percent of the original value.

"It's a niche, but there's a buyer for everything," Lovell said.

Raybin's father, a Holocaust survivor, owned meat processing and packing plants in New York, where she grew up. "I got a lot of survival instincts from him," she said.

**'We stand behind everything we sell and make sure it's wholesome.'**

MARILYN RAYBIN, co-owner,  
Marvell Foods in Boca Raton

After a marriage, kids, divorce and a move to Florida, Raybin started a food brokerage business with her brother, who worked in the deli and meat business. Running a business with family is tough, so she left it to her brother and was offered a job at a food manufacturer.

For 10 years, Raybin specialized in buying, brokering and trading diced chicken used in salads and entrees by some of the nation's largest brands. Though she said she often received negative attitudes from some of the men with whom she worked, Raybin did not allow it to stop her. Instead, it made her a tougher businesswoman.

After leaving the company, she worked for herself for several years, until finding a business partner in Lovell.

Though both grew up in New York City's Queens borough, they met at a poultry convention when Lovell was working for Raybin's brother. Widowed at 37, Lovell worked at a retouching studio and ran a Wise Snacks line to support herself and her daughter. Eventually she started her own food trading business until joining forces with Raybin.

In 2009, Marvell outgrew its space in Deerfield Beach and moved to Boca Raton off North Federal Highway. By 2011, they hope to hire 10 more employees and expand the business with a line of Marvell-branded foods.

They are currently in talks to become a Florida representative for several food companies based in the northern U.S.

"We stand behind everything we sell and make sure it's wholesome," Raybin said.

Marvell buys and sells nationally and internationally, often in South America. It is constantly receiving samples, and the women sometimes fly to see products before making a deal.

"If it gets too stressful, we go next door for manicures and pedicures," Raybin said. Every morning while getting dressed, the two talk on the phone about their upcoming day and sometimes bring their dogs to work.

Mike Howie, president of L&H Logistics based in Atlanta, said when Marvell makes a deal, it stands behind it. Like Marvell, his company buys and sells in the secondary market, and is a transportation brokerage. Howie said Marvell is one of the strongest players in the industry. It has the network to buy products and the capital and resources to sell it, he said.

"They found a niche and they fill it," Howie said.

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