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Woodlands Realtor creates a Margarita mix that is kind on the hips

By: Sondra Bosse , Trends editor



Marcy Johnson, left, and her daughter Jodi Johnson Rutledge share a cheers to the success of their product Zilch.

Zero, zilch, nada ...

That's the amount of guilt Marcy Johnson experiences when enjoying a margarita at her favorite Mexican food restaurant.

Johnson, a real estate agent in The Woodlands, concocted her own sugar-free, carb-free and calorie-free margarita mix several years ago and since putting it on the market in January, orders have been coming in from around the globe.

"It has been phenomenal," Johnson said about the popularity of the product, named Zilch.

And it started simply with Johnson tinkering in her kitchen.

"In 1998, I decided to start trying to follow a healthier lifestyle,"

Johnson said. "But it's hard, very hard."

She found it difficult to resist a tangy margarita when enjoying drinks

with friends or dining on Mexican food.

"I knew in order to stay on my diet, I was going to have to find a way to have my margaritas and not feel so deprived," Johnson said. "A regular 8-ounce margarita contains a whopping 540 calories and up to 50 carbohydrates. If you drink three of them, you probably have already consumed your entire recommended daily caloric intake before you even get to a meal."

So she tried to find a sugar-free mix that wouldn't compromise the taste and when she couldn't come up with anything, she decided to make her own.

Johnson went through a process of trial and error trying different ingredients until the taste was just right. The final product, a powdered margarita mix, uses Aspartame the same calorie-free sweetener used in diet drinks.

"Once I developed this concoction, I started taking it with me when I went to Mexican restaurants," Johnson said. "The idea is you can go to any restaurant, order water and tequila on the rocks, mix in the Zilch and have a delicious margarita."

And it's a practice that has been shared among her friends and family for years.

"Sometimes I'll have a Zilch margarita even when I'm not trying to watch my weight because they are just that good," said Johnson's daughter, Jodi Johnson Rutledge. "I'll serve these margaritas at Bunco parties and people don't know they are sugar-free they're so good."

So Johnson's son, Eric, talked her into selling her homemade concoction.

Eric Johnson, who has a tea business in Uzbekistan, was very knowledgeable of the food and beverage industry and helped Marcy put her product on the market. They got their first shipment this past January and Marcy Johnson is amazed at how the product has taken off. A box of Zilch sells for \$4.99 and includes 10 individual packets.

And the individual packets, which are about the size of a package of sweetener, are meant to be slipped into a purse or bag for easy use in restaurants. Or Zilch can also be used to make frozen margaritas and margaritas by the pitcher.

International and national orders are placed through the Web site www.zilchmixers.com. Then Ira Johnson, Eric's wife, fills the orders from the Web site.

"She's filling hundreds of orders a day," Johnson said.

And you can pick it up in this area as well. Woodlands Liquor in the village of College Park was one of the first local stores to carry the mix and it's also on the shelves at beverage shops in various village shopping centers in The Woodlands like Grogan's Mill and Sterling Ridge. Zilch is also sold at Specs in Conroe, The Woodlands and downtown Houston. It can also be found at Krogers in The Woodlands.

Currently Johnson is working on a sugar-free Hurricane mix, which she said could be on the shelves in a few months.

And the Johnsons are not only the founders, they are satisfied users of Zilch as well.

"I've lost 45 pounds and Jodi has lost 40 pounds since October," she said. "It's so easy now when you have an option that you enjoy and are still able to lose weight."

For more information on the Zilch product, visit www.zilchmixers.com or call 1-800-945-2448.

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