

ICELAND'S



CEO OF H₂O

BY HOPE GAINER

Sometimes the best things come about by accident. Entrepreneur Jon Olafsson hails originally from the 'land of fire and ice,' Iceland. At just 14, the enterprising lad started his impressive path to becoming a major media mogul – owning 85 percent of Iceland's music industry in radio, TV

and mobile phones. He was a big fish in a small country with a population of only about 300,000 people and a land mass the size of New York. In 2003 he decided to retire and sold everything. He wanted to find a bigger playground and landed in London.

About this time, Jon's son Kristjan was approached by a Saudi to find a water business in Iceland. He found one, secured it for his client, but when it came time to pay, the Saudi disappeared. The Olafssons got stuck with buying the water company. It was a blessing in disguise. Jon discovered he was a work junkie and was eager to come out of retirement. They did their due diligence and realized water could be a good business.

With about 50 percent of the market from the U.S., but only about 20 percent of the world consumption, they were ready to take on the world. They saw the success of Fiji and decided to jump on the water bandwagon and open an office in L.A. "The water category, much like the media industry where I came from, is a very crowded space. The key to success is having a very unique product and building a brand around it," Jon Olafsson, Chairman of Icelandic Glacial water, told *South Florida Opulence*.

In spring of 2004, Jon and his son Kristjan launched Icelandic Water Holdings, developed a world-class bottling plant and launched their award-winning water brand, Icelandic Glacial water. Based in Hlidarendi, Iceland, not far from Reykjavik, the water is sourced from the naturally replenishing underground Olfus Spring. The natural source was created as a result of a huge volcanic eruption 5,000 years ago. It is protected by an impenetrable layer of lava rock contained in a 128,000-acre exclusion zone replenished by rainfall and snowmelt over uninhabited and untouched lava fields, which take 400 to 600 years to reach the river source. Thus, it is a natural, renewable product. The overflow alone that goes into the ocean daily is twice the amount of all bottled water consumed worldwide.

FROM NATURE TO BOTTLE

The glacial water goes directly from the source into the state-of-the-art facility via a stainless steel pipeline. The plant is one of the greenest and cleanest, run entirely by geothermal and



hydroelectric power. The filling process is automated and hands-free, capable of producing 30,000 bottles per hour. Nothing is added or taken out of the water and it is never exposed to outside air. It has a high alkalinity and PH balance of 8.4 "The average person drinks a lot of low PH level beverages, like coffee and alcohol, so the high water PH helps to balance the body," said Jon. The first time Icelandic Glacial water comes into contact with the open air is when the consumer breaks the seal.

Adding to the perfection of the water is the sophisticated packaging with its signature sculpted, glacier-inspired bottle neck winning it numerous awards for both overall concept and design. The materials for the bottles and packaging are recyclable. Icelandic Glacial has been designated as the world's first bottled water certified as Carbon Neutral for both product and operation. Even the shipping is done by empty cargo space on vessels returning to the U.S. or Europe.

This fall, Icelandic Glacial is adding bubbles to its super-premium spring water. The new sparkling water will be delivered in glass bottles that are more round in shape to maintain carbonation. The still water will also start being available in glass, as well as in a more elegant and subtle bottle design. Kristjan Olafsson, co-founder, said the line extensions were in "a response to what the market's been telling us."

SALT OF THE EARTH

The Olafsson family seems to have come from a good gene pool full of entrepreneurial spirit. Jon's mother, who raised him in a modest home with a dirt floor in Iceland, is enamored with her son's success. "I am incredibly proud of my son. He is truly one of the hardest-working, most dedicated men I have ever known," raves Heida. Kristjan adds, "It is a privilege to work side-by-side with my father, as I've learned so much from him." Patriarch Jon chimes in, "It's been a fulfilling journey building a company with my son."

But success is not enough for these Icelanders. Giving back is always on their minds. Following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, they shipped 42 tons of water to the country. Jon Olafsson sees the charity side as his foray for the future. "I want to make sure everyone has access to clean water."

But will he ever really be able to give up the reigns and retire again? Time will tell. And a fun fact: Icelanders hold the top spot for highest life expectancy in the world. Could it be something in the water? ●

For more information and store locators:
www.icelandicglacial.com.

