

# Smoothie operator

## South Windsor man expanding West Coast smoothie chain in Connecticut

By Howard French  
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At 21, South Windsor's Yannick Nicome is already a seasoned entrepreneur.

When he was only 19, he opened the first Emerald City Smoothie chain location in the eastern U.S. at the Evergreen Walk retail complex in South Windsor. By the end of 2010, Nicome opened his second shop in Bristol, and he's already on the hunt for a third location in the state. The chain is based in Washington State.

Nicome insists he isn't a natural-born entrepreneur. He wasn't, he says, the sort of child to set up a lemonade stand or make money mowing neighbors' lawns.

However, he says, "I was always good with people."

Nicome does come by his business sense somewhat naturally. His stepfather, the late Charles E. Gooley, was CEO of Yankee Energy Services Co., known as Yankee Gas. And Nicome says he feels fortunate that as a child he was able to soak up some of his stepfather's business acumen.

"I give him all the credit," he says. Some credit also goes to his mother, Jacqueline Gooley.

"My mom and I were in New York, in Times Square," Nicome says, recalling a turning point in 2008. They were taking a break and enjoying a smoothie, Nicome says, when he offhandedly said he thought he could run a smoothie business.



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Yannick Nicome, 21, creates a "Coconut Passion" smoothie at Emerald City Smoothies in South Windsor's Evergreen Walk.

His mother's response — "Do it" — threw down the challenge.

During a subsequent trip to Seattle to visit friends, Nicome discovered Emerald City Smoothies and learned that the West Coast chain was on the verge of going east.

And a career was born.

By June 2009, Nicome had opened the Evergreen Walk location, at the LL Bean end of the shopping center. It soon attracted a core of regulars from among employees and patrons of several fitness centers in the area — especially LA Fitness, just north of the

shopping plaza.

But Emerald City isn't just for the fitness-conscious, he says. In addition to offerings aimed at body builders and other workout aficionados, Nicome says his shop has more than 40 distinct types of smoothies including selections designed to help bolster the immune system or control weight.

Still, the enthusiasm of the LA Fitness crowd for his shop led to his second store, something Nicome describes as a "boutique type" shop. That operation opened in December inside the LA Fitness gym in Bristol.

Nicome says both of his smoothie shops are doing so well that he's already looking for a third location in Connecticut, possibly in the eastern part of the state.

The smoothies range in price from \$4.25 for an "Orange Twister" at the low-fat end of the menu to \$6.25 for "The Builder," which is listed under the category "Bulk Me Up." There are even gluten-free options for those with allergies.

Nicome has goals beyond selling smoothies. One of them is to travel, possibly in connection with the Merge Missions program at the Church of the Living God in Manchester, which he attends. He traveled with the program to Chile in 2010 in the wake of that country's 8.8 magnitude earthquake.

Nicome, who attended middle school in South Windsor before switching to home schooling, also says he wants to finish college. He started by taking online courses from Oral Roberts University but put that on hold as his budding business began to demand most of his time.

"I will finish," he says of his drive to earn a degree in "business entrepreneurship," but then adds, "One thing at a time, for now."

Emerald City Smoothie opened its shop in Bellevue, Wash., in 1996. It now has more than 60 shops and plans to add 25.

Nicome's Connecticut locations so far are the only ones east of the Mississippi River, with the remaining shops in Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington.