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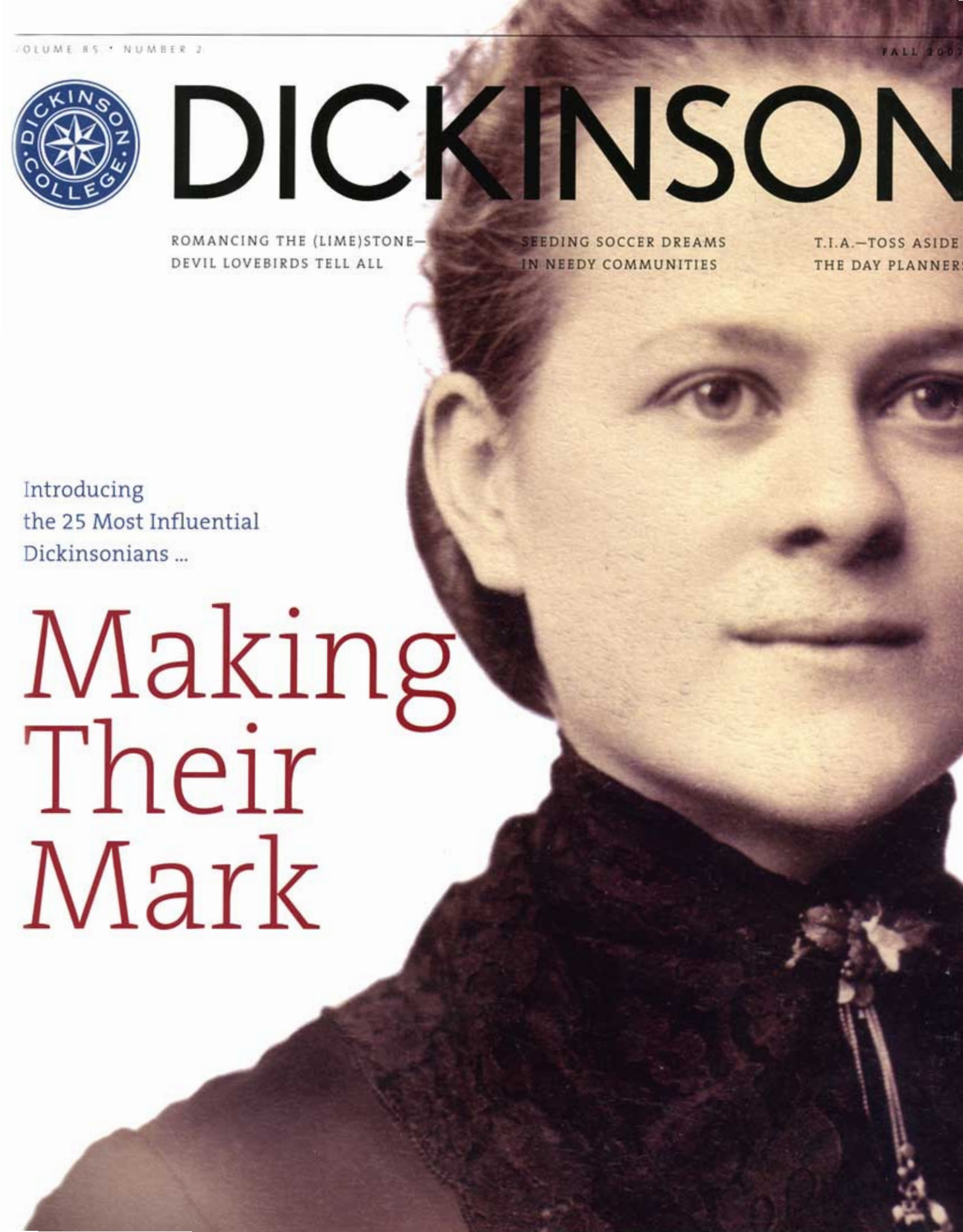
ROMANCING THE (LIME)STONE—
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Going Nuts

JUSTIN GOLD '00 RESCUES NATURAL PEANUT BUTTER FROM MONOTONY

By Alicia LeBlanc '07

WHEN YOU'VE FOUND YOUR life's passion, you've got to give it your all. Especially when that passion is peanut butter.

Justin Gold '00's journey toward peanut butter perfection began at Dickinson. His experience as an environmental-studies major inspired him to become a vegetarian "after visiting various farms and learning about farm practices," he says.

But it was after graduation, when he moved to Boulder, Colo., that he started paying attention to what he was eating. "In Colorado there are a lot of camping and outdoor activities, and I ate a lot of organic almond and peanut butter for energy, but I couldn't find any that tasted good. So I started making my own.

"I designed recipes and made lots of labels for everything," he adds. "My roommates started teasing me ... until they tasted it, and then they ate everything I made. I had to start charging them, and they suggested that I sell it."

It was perhaps at this moment that Gold fully realized the usefulness of his Dickinson education: "Basically because of Dickinson I had the confidence to walk into a business library and research how to write a business plan. I didn't take any business classes in college, but I felt like I had the right tools to find out how to do it."

All of the hard work paid off, and he founded Justin's Nut Butters in Boulder in 2004. "I originally wanted to call it Paragon Peanut Butter—paragon meaning perfect—but no one knew what that meant, so I gave up and went with Justin's."

He must have been onto something with the word paragon. To quote from a package of his honey almond butter, "Caution: May induce a euphoric state of mind." One would be wise to heed this warning, as John Devlin '90 learned.

Relatives living in Boulder who love the peanut butter and were aware of Gold's Dickinson connection gave Devlin and his wife, Elizabeth Moriarty Devlin '92, a few jars of Justin's Nut Butters as Christmas stocking-stuffers. Devlin's family was quickly won over by it. "We only got two or three jars of the stuff, and it was gone by February," he says.

So just what makes this stuff so special? The taste, of course, but also the creativity of the packaging and the flavor combinations, like sinfully cinnamon, pumpkin-pie spice and Gold's favorite, maple almond.



Justin Gold takes a sustainable approach to peanut-butter packaging.

Gold suggests adding two tablespoons of nut butter to oatmeal for more flavor and protein—he prefers to add maple almond butter. Any nut butter also may be used in a standard peanut-butter-cookie recipe. The pumpkin-pie-spice peanut butter is especially delightful in the fall.

Gold also solved the traditional natural-nut-butter conundrum: how to make sure that the oil didn't separate from the nut butter.


"After a lot of research and trial and error, I found an organic, nonhydrogenated oil that forms peanut butter that doesn't separate." Moreover, he says, "We offer excitement, fun and personality to an otherwise boring [product]."

However, the peanut-butter market is saturated with products, and Gold "had to be creative and sell peanut butter in a way that is different." For this reason, he invented the peanut-butter squeeze packet.

As an avid backpacker, climber and runner, Gold recognized the value of portable nut butters. The squeeze packets "allow us to be the only nut butter that can market to certain areas, like bakeries and hiking stores, as well as dieticians who can use the packets to teach portion control."

Gold jokingly remarks, "The squeeze packets allow us to boldly go where no other nut butter has gone before." Although the "sky's the limit" for these little packets, Gold's environmental-science background fuels his concern for the waste they create. He is trying to devise more eco-friendly, recyclable packaging.

Despite the challenges of running a small company—making, delivering and marketing a product as well as doing the books—the experience has been positive. His Dickinson degree has proved a big asset.

"On my wall I have a few things: a star chart, my first dollar bill from a sale, a picture of Willy Wonka, my preschool diploma and my Dickinson diploma. I was really inspired by Dickinson professors to combine what I ate with the environment and to have less impact on this world." 

For more information, go to <www.justinsnutbutter.com>.