



Left: Shane Emmett. Above: Health Warrior Chia Bars.

HEALTH WARRIOR SOWS SEEDS OF SUCCESS

Shane Emmett wants to transform the way you think about snack bars.

« INTERVIEW BY SANDRA SHELLEY »

The work of managing an overnight sensation should be draining, but Health Warrior CEO Shane Emmett is the picture of vitality. The energetic 34-year-old arrives at a coffee shop in downtown Richmond wearing a running jacket, perhaps having just squeezed in one of his three- to five-mile lunchtime sprints around Belle Isle or the Buttermilk Trail. The week before, Emmett traveled to four states in five days, promoting his company's popular chia seed products. It's a schedule he has kept up since launching Health Warrior in 2010.

When Emmett and friends Dan Gluck and Nick Morris—all former NCAA Division I athletes—started their company, most people didn't think of chia seeds as something to eat. "It used to be, 'Oh, like the Chia Pet?'" Emmett recalls. Then, last January, a full-page article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* touting the benefits of the super fuel, naming Health Warrior as the brand of seeds used by Baltimore Ravens' running back Ray Rice. Within a few hours, the fledgling company's bagged seeds were the #2 selling food in the grocery department on Amazon. "We sold all of our inventory within a few days," he says. By the end of 2012, Health Warrior's sales had increased a whopping 650 percent over the year before.

In December 2011, the company debuted the Health Warrior Chia Bar, a 100 percent natural, nutrient-rich bar that has picked up national distributions through Whole Foods and other

stores. Being a part of the food industry is quite a change of pace for Emmett, a Richmond lawyer and history buff whose background includes archeological digs in his childhood hometown of Williamsburg, a law degree from Oxford and a stint working in the Office of the Counselor of Governor Tim Kaine. But he couldn't resist the lure of the tiny seeds, which he calls "a great food with an Indiana Jones history." The seeds are packed with more omega-3s than salmon and more protein than oatmeal. "It's a shockingly powerful food," he says.

How did your interest in chia seeds begin?

Nick, Dan and I had all read *Born to Run* [about the Tarahumara tribe of Copper Canyon, Mexico, renowned for their barefoot running], and there are a few paragraphs in there about how these phenomenal long distance athletes eat chia seeds as their powerful fuel. And it alludes to the rich history of the chia seeds with the Aztec warriors ... who used chia seeds when they went into battle ... Nick was really the first one to start eating the chia seeds, then turned everyone else on to it.

Were there other chia manufacturers then?

People have been selling it for a long time, but it was not really popular until recently. When we started eating the seeds two years ago, we would order them off the Internet. The seeds would arrive in scary Ziploc bags with handmade labels

on them—but we still ate them. Or we'd find them tucked away in the fiber aisle of a health food store ... So it's gone from that, where we literally thought about starting the company because it was just so darn hard to find good ones, to [being] the fastest growing category in the food world today. It's been quite a thing to watch over the course of the past 24 months.

Did your background as a college athlete influence your interest in chia seeds?

When Dan, Nick and I were college athletes [Emmett swam and Gluck played tennis at Colgate; Morris played football at Penn] the athletic departments didn't talk to you about nutrition the way they do now. We trained four hours a day for swimming, and yet no one talked to you about how you kept your body well fueled ... It's too bad, because it could have made a big difference, I think, and it's something that a lot of athletes realize now.

What is the nutritional value of chia seeds?

We always talk about the big four: the phenomenal amount of omega-3s, fiber, vegan protein with a full amino acid profile, and very high antioxidant level. It's a very nutrient-dense food, so for the relatively low number of calories, it represents an awful lot of nutrition—as juxtaposed with the example of corn syrup, which is a very high calorie ingredient with a very low amount of nutrition.

Is yours the first bar with chia as the #1 ingredient?

Exactly. If you go to a grocery store and look at the bars, most of them will not have a high-nutrient superfood as the main ingredient. Our bars only have five grams of sugar per bar, which is very low compared to all the other bars on the shelf ... And what's paired with that is the fact that this tiny bar has 16 percent of your daily fiber, which is very, very satiating. So even though it's 100 calories, it actually fills you up.

How did you come up with the Health Warrior name?

In addition to connecting with the Aztec warrior story, the name applies to those who are able to overcome the challenges of modern life ... to aspire to a more healthy way of living. Health Warrior speaks to people playing pro sports and also the mom with three kids, working and trying to get in a daily three-mile jog.

HealthWarrior.com ✱