

# Fort Worth Business Press

## Yums on deck: Shoe gurus are takin' it to tha streets

BY BETTY DILLARD

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They're fresh to death and already the flavor of choice across the hip-hop nation, and that has the designers of Yums Shoes walking on air.

With its first shipment launched in November 2007, the Arlington-based company is on fire. The pop-colored sneakers with graffiti influence are the "sole of the street" among rappers and target consumers, teens ages 14 to 18.

Thanks to an exclusive multi-year sneaker and apparel contract recently inked between Yums and Grammy-nominated Atlanta rap artist Soulja Boy Tell'em, the shoes and apparel are getting even hotter.

"Our sales are through the roof. We get orders constantly," says Yums CEO JP McDade. "We're selling well even in this tough economy. Online sales have increased thousands of percentage points from when we opened. We're selling well in Europe, Australia, Canada – all over the world. They've gone international very quickly. It's really exciting."

The self-proclaimed "godfather of sole," McDade, 42, has a degree in information systems from the University of Texas at Arlington. He and wife, Joan McDade, have created and managed several companies, including Dr. Kleen, a medical office cleaning company, and a clothing line called Texas Sportswear.

While a graduate MBA student at Notre Dame University – he graduated in 1991 – McDade started Puppet Planet, a line of handcrafted puppets that he sold in 2002.

Now, McDade, who teaches marketing full time at Tarrant County College District's South Campus, is one step ahead of the competition with his arty footwear.

"I've always enjoyed entrepreneurship, taking an idea – whether it's my idea or combining forces with someone else's idea – and developing it," McDade says.

Wanting to add a trendy street-influence line to his sportswear, McDade went to Dallas "to find the best graffiti artist in the area."

He found legendary Deep Ellum graffiti artist and "Supa Throwed" designer Tex, one of the

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Yum Shoes photo by Jon P. Uzzel "Tex" and J.P. McDade

founding members of Infinity Crew, who drew some T-shirt designs for McDade. Tex, 30, then came up with a cutting edge sketch for sneakers with bold flavors and crystal clear soles tagged with his original graffiti.

Tex, a.k.a. Howard Moton Jr., comes from a family of artists: his father is an oil painter, his mother went to design school in New York and his brother is a musician. He attended an arts magnet school in Dallas and got into graffiti his freshman year in high school.

“I always loved shoes growing up. Sneakers have always been important to make a statement,” Tex said. “Art is also important to me so I just blended them together.”

McDade says Tex’s sneakers are a perfect fit for Yums.

“I was looking to do something that was fresh and new and thought it sounded exciting,” McDade says.

The pair wrote up a business plan, put together some capital and hired two shoe engineers from Nike to kick-start their plan. The Yums brand, emblazoned with Tex’s signature logo, started out in mom-and-pop boutiques and is now in 150 stores nationwide. McDade is currently negotiating placing the brand in Nordstrom, Finish Line and Foot Action, with more retail locations to come, he says. Eventually, Yums will have its own stores.

For now, JP and Joan McDade run Yums out of a 6,000-square-foot office/warehouse space. Mom Donna McDade keeps the books, niece Jill Stevenson handles orders, packing and shipping, and daughter Mackenzie McDade, 16, and son JJ McDade, 14, help fold shirts, pack and clean. Kent Little, promotions manager, and Mike Jenkins, national sales director, have been McDade’s friends since the fourth grade.

“It’s all family and friends we know and trust,” says McDade.

Tex conceives all the colors, styles and designs for the Yums brand. The current lineup of flavors sounds like a farmer’s market: candy apple, lemon lime, grape, kiwi-strawberry, cupcake and s’mores. Most shoes are \$85 and all come with a Yums logo key chain.

The “Block Star” line of sneakers, which cost about \$125 a pair, are endorsed and designed by rappers such as Tony “Tum Tum” Richardson and athletes, including NBA player Marquis Daniels of the Indiana Pacers.

Soulja Boy and Tex will design his own signature Block Star shoes and street-oriented apparel for Yums Shoes. The rapper will combine marketing of Yums with his record and management company, Collipark Music/Interscope Geffen A&M Records.

“It’s going to give us a lot of international exposure,” says McDade. “He speaks well to our target audience. He’s representative beyond the music that he does. He’s representative of the new wave that kids connect. They connect on the Internet. Soulja Boy is innovative that way – he communicates with kids on a daily basis,” he says. “That’s the market Yums taps into.

It's already had a positive impact on our business.”

McDade says that Soulja Boy recently shot a video in Los Angeles. “Yums will be on MTV, ET, videos and shows in Europe. It's huge marketing exposure for us.”

According to McDade, Yums is going mainstream when four new lines will hit stores in time for Christmas, including an old-school high-top sneaker and Jelly Bean and Daisies series for girls.

“It's how music and fashion all blend together, that's really what the brand is all about,” McDade says. “It's a fun line; it's very friendly and has the innovativeness of the street from Tex. It's creative artwork and vision.”

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