

Daily Herald

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BUSINESS LEDGER

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HOT LAVA

50 YEARS LATER,
ICONIC LAMP STILL
A TOP PRODUCT FOR
LIFESPAN BRANDS

President and CEO
Clay Farnsworth of
Elk Grove Village-based
LifeSpan Brands LLC





Lighting the Way

Iconic Lava Lamp,
other products keep
Elk Grove company
viable to next generation

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Lava Lamps at LifeSpan Brands LLC in Elk Grove Village.

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The iconic Lava Lamp can be a conversation piece, a night light, or even part of a living room lamp.

It's also been a moneymaker for it's manufacturer, Elk Grove Village-based LifeSpan Brands LLC.

After more than 50 years, the company continues to catch the attention of consumers of all ages with the legendary lamp as well as new products introduced each year, said President and CEO Clay Farnsworth, 63.

"This is the only one with that shape and it's trademarked," said Farnsworth, an Arlington Heights resident. "You ask families if they know the Lava Lamp and 93 percent of them will say yes. It's the official one. Retailers have tried selling the knock-offs and realize they don't sell and consumers want the real thing, the shape and the brand."

The company revenues have already doubled during the last six



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CEO Clay Farnsworth of LifeSpan Brands LLC in Elk Grove Village talks about the company's primary product, Lava Lamps.

years, he said. And while the privately held company will not provide any annual profit numbers, Farnsworth said he still aims to double revenue again in the next three years.

LifeSpan offers various shapes and sizes of the light, along with its proprietary chemicals inside that allow globs of wax to heat up and float around, all for about \$14.99

to \$129.99. Some even offer novelties inside, like glitter, small toy fish or a spewing volcano. And more new products are on the way, said Farnsworth.

While it's inexpensive enough to be an impulse purchase, it's also ornate enough to be a furniture accent, said David Aron, a Naperville resident and marketing professor at Brennan School of Business at Dominican University in River Forest.

"I think the staying power is found in how people can project any functionality onto it that they want, and that beyond the floating blobs it's so adaptable in how it's presented and how it's used. I'll admit I'll stare at a Lava Lamp to get my creativity flowing," said Aron.

How it started

The first motion lamp was designed in 1963 by English engineer Edward Craven Walker, who marketed it under the name of

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LifeSpan Brands LLC in Elk Grove

LifeSpan Brands

(formerly Lava Lite LLC)

Business: Maker of the iconic Lava Lamp. Also sells the Lava Novelty, Lava Party, WeighRite, PrecisionOne and Detecto brands.

Founded: 1965

Headquarters: Elk Grove Village

President & CEO: Clay Farnsworth

Owner: BW Capital in Chicago

Employees: 20

Web site: <https://lavalamp.com/>

Twitter: @LavaLamp

Facebook: www.facebook.com/LavaLamp

of Astro Lamp. Then two American entrepreneurs in 1965 saw the lamp on display at a trade show in Brussels and then bought the rights to make the Lava Lamp, company history said.

In 2008, Chicago-based BW Capital acquired the Lava Corp. successor company, Lava World International, and changed the company name to Lava Lite LLC.

The company name changed again earlier this year to LifeSpan Brands because they sell other products, such as WeightRite, PrecisionOne and Detecto weight scales. Some of the bathroom scales include Bluetooth technology, apps, and data that can be graphed weekly, monthly or yearly and results can be shared from a spreadsheet.

So why would the famed Lava Lamp company bring in bathroom weight scales? It's due, in part, to Farnsworth's own history as a salesman and entrepreneur in Chicago.

Must be destiny

Farnsworth's first job was at a Community Discount Store and he commuted every day from school. He took the El on Irving Park and got off near a building on Paulina Street that, at the time, had housed the Lava Lamp company, he said.

He passed the building all the time and didn't expect to one day lead that company. He then got a new job at the former Goldblatt's department store, working his way up to salesman, manager and buyer.

"I was learning to buy and sell," he said. "It was like my college."

He then became a manufacturer's rep and liked factory sales. He landed in the bathroom scale business a few years later. He started handling national accounts, such as Kmart, Wal-Mart and others, and soon met

Lawrence Zalusky of Health O Meter, a bathroom scales company. They eventually went different ways, but reunited in 1996 at Taylor, another producer of bathroom scales.

Taylor was then sold in 2002 to Home-o-matics and Farnsworth decided to just do consulting. He opened an office in downtown Arlington Heights while he and his wife raised two children in the same suburb.

What's next for Lava

By 2010, Farnsworth was tapped to lead Lava Lite LLC and he eventually brought in the lines of bathroom scales because of his experience and knowledge with them, he said.

"So what's Lava doing in the bathroom scale business? It's all part of our lifestyle," he said.

After all, the company's products can be found in Bed Bath and Beyond, Target, Meijer and other stores, he said.

"Retailers want proof that something is going to sell," said Farnsworth. "So we have to fine tune our products if something is going to win over a consumer, or it just won't make it."

All the Lava Lamps are made at a factory in China, and Farnsworth and his team make multiple trips to China and to offices in Manchester, England, to check on quality and manufacturing processes, he said.

While it takes about 9 months from idea to manufacturing to shipping a ready-made product, Farnsworth is already looking further into the future.

This fall, the company plans to launch its BrightSource brand of lamps for home decor, where the lava contents float around in the base of a lamp with a shade. Those could be bought for \$59.99 and up, said Farnsworth.



Chemist Ashour Zaia works on a new color for a Lava Lamp at LifeSpan Brands LLC in Elk Grove Village.

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TAKEAWAYS

- The 50-year-old Lava Lamp has been a favorite for generations and the company has expanded to offer other products, including bathroom scales. Selling various products has helped the company triple its revenue in the last six years and it aims to double it again over the next three years.
- Elk Grove Village-based LifeSpan Brands, formerly Lava Lite LLC, has only 20 employees here and contracts most of the work in manufacturing their products in China.
- Company CEO Clay Farnsworth used to pass by the former site of the Lava Lamp company in Chicago on his way to school. And now he heads the company in to the future, aiming to launch new product brands and more variations of the iconic Lava Lamp.
- Farnsworth also says that an acquisition in the future is possible.

The whole idea of introducing a new line of lamps is to keep the Lava Lamp interest alive with the next generation, Farnsworth said. "We see big growth with the new

BrightSource lamps for homes," he said. "And an acquisition could be next. We also want to look to more international growth next."