

# Thomas Coffee Co.



## OLD BRANDS, RENEWED

In St. Louis, nostalgia exerts a truly supernatural pull, exemplified by the return from death or near death of numerous popular area foods – most recently, Thomas Coffee.

A bit of background. When Mavrakos Chocolates reappeared this year, excited gasps arose. The original candy, available from 1913 to 1984, was sold in dedicated stores in the '50s. Chocolate, Chocolate, Chocolate's Dan Abel Jr. acquired the brand, recipes and all, and rebooted it.

Similarly, Lemp Lager (arguably the first American lager, available from 1840 through Prohibition) helped make St. Louis into Beertown, USA. An investor group relaunched it five years ago.

Now, Thomas Coffee never actually went away. But, explained new owner Bob Betz, the gourmet roast never reached its full potential, either.

The brand, famous for the Scottie on the label, dates from 1905 but faced declining sales in recent years. Betz reworked the classic brew, crafted new flavors (including an antioxidant-rich blend coming in '10), updated the packaging and switched to certified fair-trade growers. "We didn't want to sell any coffee from places where they beat up the workers for 10 cents an hour," he said.

It's not just South American workers who concern Betz. "I look at St. Louis over the last 30 years, and we used to have all these corporate headquarters here, and they're all gone," he said. "I have five kids, and I'd love to be able to keep them living in St. Louis."

Stay tuned to see what other brands join the *Everything Old Is New Again* hit parade.

– Byron Kerman