

DeKalb company stirring brew for civil rights

By Beverly German

Staff Writer

When beer lovers in 31 Southeastern cities buy their weekend six-pack next month they will find a new malt liquor on the shelves which was put there by two black south DeKalb businessmen who plan to donate a portion of their profits to civil rights organizations.

Leon Oldham and Dr. Curtis Dilworth

worth, both successful businessmen, decided to go into the beer business about a year ago. They tested the waters with an intensive market study which determined that malt liquor, which has a higher alcohol content than beer, is one of the fastest growing beer products. They also found that blacks are the biggest consumers of malt liquor.

Dilworth, 41, and Oldham, 44, expect

to make money on their "Big Man" malt liquor, which will be marketed by their company, "DO, Inc." — an acronym formed by the initials of their last names. But they also intend to contribute a portion of those earnings — 25 cents per case — to the organizations which they believe helped pave the way for black enterprise.

"I'm not in it just for the money," said Dilworth, whose lucrative 15-year dental practice in south DeKalb County has provided much of the financial backing for the business. "I feel it's time we do something for the community, as well as make a profit."

Oldham said he and his partner will be making contributions to the National Urban League, the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the United Negro College Fund "to show our gratitude to these organizations" for their work in helping achieve civil rights for minorities.

"We don't want any endorsements from them; we just felt a need to return something to them," Oldham said.

Oldham, a former vice president for City Beverage Co., an Atlanta-based beer distribution firm, said his year-long market study provided the basis for the direction his firm has taken. The company will market first to cities with at least a 20 percent black population, and will advertise on television and radio stations that reach a majority black audience in those cities.

"Small business or big business, you've got to see if there is a market for your product," Oldham said. "Nobody should ever get into business without knowing what you're getting into and who's going to buy your product."

Dilworth, who owns the Candler Dental Center where he employs three other dentists, said he has "semi-retired" from his practice to devote all his time to the "Big Man" endeavor.

"I have experience with management, so I was just completely encompassed with development of the product," said Dilworth, who worked for an aluminum firm before becoming a dentist.

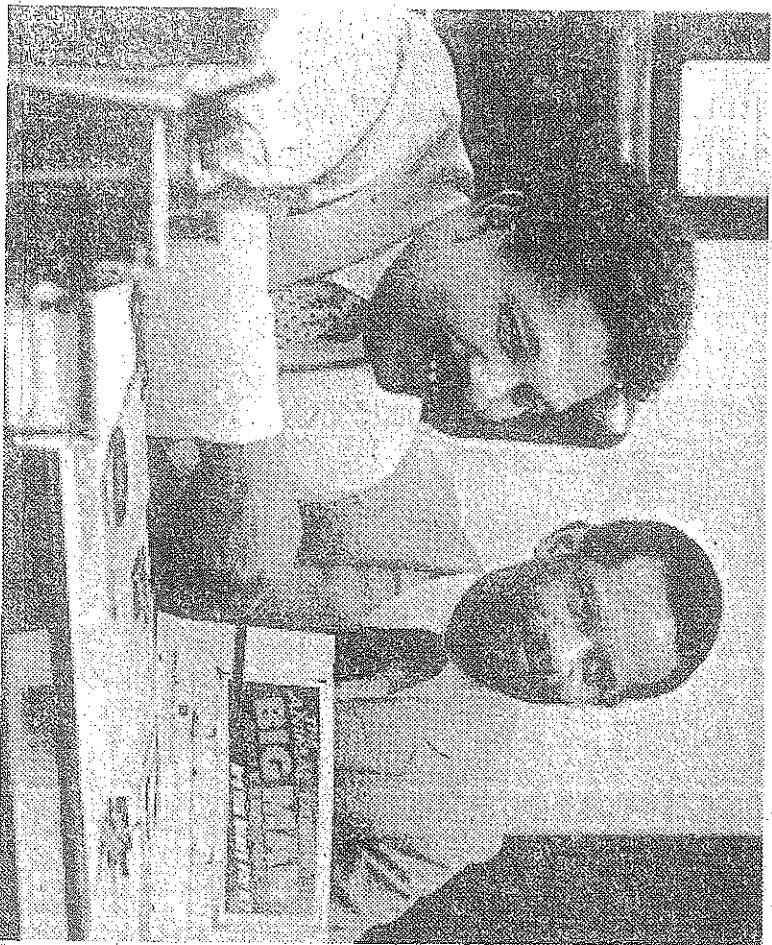
Oldham also brings expertise and business savvy to the new project. During a three-year stint as vice-president of City Beverage Co., sales skyrocketed from \$4 million to \$22 million, he said. Before that, Oldham served as assistant vice president of sales for Pabst Brewing Co. in Atlanta.

The new malt liquor will be manufactured at a brewery in Hammon, N.J. and sold starting April 8 through distributors in Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and the District of Columbia, Oldham said. With \$150,000 already invested in their project, a confident Oldham projects first-year sales at about \$10 million.

"Obviously we're competing with the big boys," Oldham said. "That's why we couldn't go in this in a small way."

Oldham came up with the name "Big Man" after surveying the market and finding that most other malt liquors were associated with ferocious animals, such as bulls and colts.

"I was hoping to find an animal that dominated all, but as I looked around the only thing I could find was an elephant, and I didn't think people would like a beer called elephant," he said. "Then it occurred to me that man has dominion over animals."



Leon Oldham, left, and Dr. Curtis Dilworth with new "Big Man" malt liquor to be distributed starting April 8. (Photo — Billy Downs)

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