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August 2007, the couple introduced Ayala's Herbal Water to the market.

Why enter an industry as saturated as the bottled-water business? "Because there's no beverage out there like ours," says Laufer-Cahana. Ayala water is free of what the couple calls the "junk": the sugars and artificial ingredients found in most of the drinks that populate grocery-store beverage aisles. Ayala's Herbal Water has no calories, chemicals, preservatives, colors or sweeteners. Instead, it's infused with fresh organic herbs and is sourced from an artesian well in Virginia.

"I think everything you put in your mouth should taste good, but it can taste good and also be healthy," says Laufer-Cahana, who, as a doctor, often cautioned parents not to give their children soft drinks. "A lot of people find water boring," she says. "I wanted to give these people an alternative that's healthful and flavorful."

Ayala's Herbal Water comes in flavors that are a refreshing alternative to common fruity combos. Its popular blends include Cinnamon-Orange Peel, Lemongrass-Mint-Vanilla and Ginger-Lemon Peel. The water is available in more than 2,500 retail locations across the country—most of them high-end organic stores. In the Philadelphia area those include Whole Foods and DiBruno Bros.

Laufer-Cahana says that she hopes Ayala will encourage a backlash against soda and other unhealthy drinks. She would also like the business to expand in order to reach as broad a consumer base as possible.

"I hope the water will remind people that being healthy can be as easy as eating well," says Laufer-Cahana. But she is quick to point out that her focus on nutrition doesn't mean she's against the occasional indulgence.

"My opinion from a personal perspective, and from that of a physician, is that some drinks are worth the extra calories," she says. "And cappuccino and wine are absolutely worth it!" Visit herbalwater.com.

A Toast to Health

A local woman's organic beverage is changing the way people think about water. BY MOLLY KNIGHT RASKIN

AYALALAUFER-CAHANA'S road to entrepreneurial success was not exactly direct. Her background is in medicine and art, not business. And the idea for her product—Ayala's Herbal Water—came not from a boardroom meeting, but from the backyard garden of her suburban Philadelphia home.

"I use my own herbs to flavor everything," says Laufer-Cahana, a pediatrician, working artist and mother of three. "And one summer, I started using them to flavor water." When her family and friends tasted her homemade beverages, Laufer-Cahana says the response was unanimous: "People loved them."

That's when her husband, Albert Cahana, stepped in. With a career as a cereal entrepreneur, Cahana had the smarts to see a business opportunity at his own dinner table.

"When I saw the reaction from guests who came over and drank the water, I began to do some research," says Cahana. "Suddenly, I thought, Wow, there is something pioneering about this." In