

Site sweetens sales for cupcake couple

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Livonia pair's specialty outgrew kitchen, so they leased ex-Burghardt's bakery for Just Baked.

LIVONIA - Ovens that once baked loaves of sourdough rye bread are now churning out s'mores, apple pie, banana split, rocky road and other flavors of cupcakes.

The former home of Burghardt's Bakery, a family-run operation that dated back to 1872 before Bob Burghardt closed it last year, now produces cupcakes created by Pam and Todd Turkin, who opened Just Baked in the building.

The Turkins decided to begin the business after finding success making unusual cupcakes for lawyers, pharmaceutical representatives and gourmet markets.

"I was baking cupcakes out of my house and it was getting to the point where my little ovens weren't going to make it anymore," Pam said. "We saw Burghardt's and he needed a tenant and we needed a kitchen."

They opened Just Baked in December with the idea of using the building to simply bake cupcakes for clients. The retail portion was an afterthought, she said.

But ever since they started selling cupcakes up front, 90 percent of their cupcakes are now sold directly to customers and they have been "crazy busy."

"I am not exaggerating," Turkin said. "I think it's the type of business. The cupcakes are \$2. They're unusual. They taste great. I think for \$2 you can come in and get a treat. It's a happy place."

Those are just some reasons why cupcakes have become a hot trend, according to Rick Bittner, executive director of the Retail Bakers of America.

"Cupcakes offer nostalgic memories," Bittner said. "They are somewhat indulgent, but portion-controlled. People like cake and people like frosting. Cupcakes lend themselves to be filled easily and come in lots of different flavors."

They also transport easily and are great for activities where people want a choice of flavors, he added.

Many bakers are selling only cupcakes while full-line outlets have had success adding the treat to their regular offerings, Bittner said. Some couples are even choosing cupcakes instead of wedding cake for their receptions.

In Southeast Michigan, several cupcake-only places have opened, including the Cupcake Station in Birmingham and Ann Arbor. Even non-bakeries are joining the cupcake craze. Cold Stone Creamery is promoting its own line of ice cream cupcakes through March 31.

At Just Baked, people stop by in the morning to grab a dozen for work and crowds form after school when moms and their children show up, Turkin said.

On Valentine's Day, the store sold 1,500 cupcakes. Between 200 to 250 head out the door on weekdays and 800 to 1,000 on weekends, she said.

The couple now has five employees, including three who used to work for Burghardt's.

And while they plan to concentrate on cupcakes and add ice cream this summer, Turkin said she would eventually like to bake some loaves of Burghardt's sourdough rye.

"People still come in looking for the bread," she said.

"These ovens are where it was baked and we hope it will be baked again."

Just Baked

*Specialty: cupcakes

*Flavors: apple pie, rocky road, banana split, s'mores

*Cost: \$1.50 for standard, \$2 for gourmet

*Location: 33309 Seven Mile, Livonia

*Information: (248) 255-1440

Neal Haldane is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.

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