

# Metro Detroit Food Chains Look to Take New Ground

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Soon, Metro Detroit will have yet another claim to fame: It will be known nationwide as the home base for Just Baked cupcakes.

The Livonia-based business is taking its luscious treats to The Show. Within weeks, the cupcake company will start shipping its top flavors – including the famous Red Velvet and Cherry Chip – to grocery stores across the country.



At the same time, officials said they are franchising its cupcake stores with the hope of having as many as 200 retail locations throughout the United States by 2014. I'm thinking world domination via extreme calorie consumption is not far behind.

If I may throw around the "Imported from Detroit" tag line, it's starting to feel like our little hometown is going to be famous for its fab food finds. In addition to Just Baked, other local chains such as bd's Mongolian Grill, Bagger Dave's Legendary Burgers and Olga's Kitchen have recently announced plans to take their signature food and service far outside of the friendly confines of the Mitten.

Olga's has said it could have as many as 100 new locations and be going national by 2016. Bagger Dave's and its made-fresh burgers will add three locations in 2011 and a total of up to 24 new locations over the next five years. And bd's has nearly a dozen locations in the works to take its casual-dining concept beyond the Midwest. Delicious dining, indeed.

Michigan has always been known for our love of food; you don't get on that many lists as one of the most overweight states without enjoying a bag of potato chips or 12. But now the rest of the nation will know just how much of a foodie find we truly are. And that is a reputation we can afford to cultivate.

Personally, I like eating Pam Turkin's cupcakes. They're like little fluffy clouds covered with mounds of lip-smacking frosting. I'm rooting for her company to succeed within Michigan – and beyond. What I especially like is she remains committed to this state and its people during her expansion plans.

Truly, Just Baked is a story about a husband-and-wife team that turned a little idea into a big deal. Pam and Todd Turkin started Just Baked in 2009 with one bakery. Now, there are six stores in Metro Detroit. A partnership with Ferndale's Garden Fresh Gourmet management to support its nationwide expansion through retail and wholesale channels will take the chain into household-name status. When all is said and done, Just Baked's cupcakes could be found in as many as 10,000 grocery stores; that is a treat empire that even Willie Wonka would be proud to possess.

Throughout this process, Just Baked could have found new digs in another state, some flashier location. But its relationships here, especially with the Garden Fresh empire, are what gave the bakery group its funding and confidence to expand. As such, when Just Baked decided to it needed a larger manufacturing facility, it began and ended its search in Metro Detroit.

"We're staying in Livonia, which is what we wanted to do," Turkin told me this week. "It's more than 15,000 square feet, and we're excited about that because we're going way bigger than where we were at."



Its first shot at franchising also has gone well. Its Brighton franchise opened this month, and a Troy location will be up and running within summer. And it sounds like the ink is drying on franchise agreements in



other nearby cities – Turkin hinted that the chain “may be going East and even downriver” in the months to come.

Turkin added that the initial response to its grocery store offering has been impressive. The cupcakes, which will come in packs of two, will show up in stores by the end of May. And if you out-of-towners want to get your lips around these gorgeous specimens before that, Just Baked should have its online store up and running sometime around June.

“Everything just keeps moving along,” Turkin said. “Every day, we get up and saying, ‘What are we going to do next?’”

We will all be waiting and watching.