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'Closet baker' turns passion for cupcakes into growing business

By [Nathan Skid](#)

In little more than a year, Pam Turkin has turned her passion for baking cupcakes into **Just Baked LLC**, a profitable business with revenue expected to hit \$1.6 million this year.

Turkin spent 25 years in marketing and advertising, most recently as the national sales and marketing manager for Orlando, Fla.-based **Krunchie Corp.**

She got the idea for Just Baked while traveling on business.

"I was standing in line at **Magnolia Bakery** in New York City with my co-workers and saw how many people were standing in line. It was nuts," Turkin said. "I felt like we could do something like that here, but everyone told me I was crazy."

After visiting **Bleeding Heart Bakery** and **Molly's Cupcakes** in Chicago, **Sprinkles** in Los Angeles and **Georgetown Cupcakes** in Boston, she decided it was time to bring the concept home to Detroit.

"We never get anything cool in Detroit," she said. "We are always way behind the trends."

While Turkin understands the fickle nature of trends, she believes in the staying power of the cupcake.

"A piece of cake is not a fad," she said. "And cupcakes are just small cakes."

So Turkin spent a year perfecting recipes and baking out of her home.

"I am a self-proclaimed closet baker," she said. "I am not from the culinary world. I don't have a degree, so I bake like I bake at home."

She began taking orders from friends and family, and said she realized she was making waves when a judge called to tell her how much he liked her cupcakes.

The operation quickly outgrew her modest kitchen. So in 2008, she and her husband, Todd, decided to use their savings to move it into the former **Burghardt's Bakery** at 33309 Seven Mile Rd. in Livonia.

"We financed ourselves one refrigerator at a time,"

she said. "This is a great time to open a business in Detroit because of the great deals you can get in real estate."

The 2,400-square-foot kitchen was outfitted with two 36-pan rotating ovens, which helped Turkin keep up with increasing demand.

Now, Just Baked makes 60,000 cupcakes a week and is running three

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night shifts just to keep up.

"We decided early on that we were going to focus on selling cupcakes by the dozens," She said. "But I am conscience of what's going on in the baking world and we will continue to evolve and bring in new products."

Just Baked, which has 57 employees, also offers custom cake decorating, which was growing so fast that Turkin stopped taking orders weeks in advance just to keep up.

The specialty bakery is looking to hire three more cake decorators and has just committed to a 1,000-square-foot space dedicated solely to cake decorating.

"Though we are a cupcake shop, we will always try and be the bakery that is new and hip and on top of trends," she said.

Turkin said she constantly looks for new flavors and outlets for her cupcakes, but is hesitant to put them on grocery store shelves.

"I'm a little scared to take a product to retail because I think you lose control over the way the products are handled," she said. "Something as simple as the way they are stored can really affect them."

Turkin said she is working with Detroit-based Faygo Beverages Inc. to bring pop-flavored cupcakes to market, but the soda company declined to discuss details.

Turkin said branded cupcakes are also gaining popularity; her clients include the **Food Network**, **NBC Universal** and **Harpo Studios**.

Just Baked has opened stores in **Westgate Mall** in Ann Arbor, **Twelve Oaks Mall** in Novi, and most recently on Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak.

Turkin said she is looking to expand into other major cities, as well.

"I am confident if we went into another city like New York or Chicago we would be successful," she said.

Turkin wasn't the only one who noticed the growing popularity of the bite- size treats.

In April, Eva Watts and her brother Leon Ochoa opened **Cup.Cake**, a 1,000-square-foot bakery located at 3202 Crooks Rd. in Royal Oak.

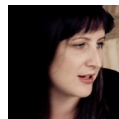
"Why not here?" Watts said. "Things happen out east, and out west, and then happen here. Now it's our time."

While Cup.Cake hasn't been open long, Watts said she thinks the cupcake niche is wide open in metro Detroit and isn't concerned about an overly crowded marketplace.

"Cupcakes are popular," she said.

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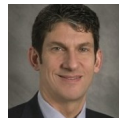
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