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## Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers

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By Pamela A. Zinkosky

**J**ust say the word “cupcake” and a smile comes to your face. “Who doesn’t love a cupcake?” says Pam Turkin, the founder of Livonia-based Just Baked who in 2008 saw the cupcake trend taking hold and wanted a piece of the cake, so to speak.

“It’s an affordable luxury,” says Turkin.

In 2008, Turkin was a marketing professional who traveled extensively – 75 round trips in one year – and baked on weekends. “I would literally start baking on Friday night,” she says.

Her experimental cupcake flavors passed or failed as her five kids – ages 15 to 21 — and their friends chose their favorites. Whatever was gone was a hit, Turkin explains.

The end of 2008 found Turkin traveling back and forth to Florida – she would have to move to keep

her job – a little worried about her husband who had recently lost his job, and still thinking about – and baking – cupcakes.

So when the longstanding Burkhardt’s Bakery on Seven Mile and Farmington Roads closed its doors, she saw an opportunity to move the baking out of her kitchen and bake more cupcakes to sell to specialty shops and kiosks. Just Baked was born.

Then one day Just Baked baked a little too much, and Turkin suggested putting out the “open” sign and selling cupcakes over the front retail counter, which they had never used. “We sold a lot of cupcakes that day,” she says.

Just Baked kept its “open” sign out and reeled in \$1,700 in retail sales for the month of January 2009. The following month, the company made \$17,000 in retail sales. Just Baked was officially in the retail business, Turkin was officially the full-time proprietor.

Fast forward a couple years. Just Baked now has a new 16,000-square-foot production facility at Interstate 96 and Merriman Roads, seven retail locations and plans for a couple more to open, cupcakes at the Coffee Beanery at Detroit Metropolitan Airport and two-pack cupcakes available in grocery stores around the country.

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The I-96 facility handles all the company's baking, which provides quality control, Turkin says. It has the capacity to bake some 16 million cupcakes a year, which offers room for growth considering the former Livonia bakery – now a retail location – baked about 850,000 cupcakes last year.

In addition to custom cakes, Just Baked offers 65 different cupcake flavors, including the six most-popular ones — Vanilla Stuffed, Chocolate Stuffed, Chocolate Dream, Red Velvet, Carrot and Cherry Chip – that sell in two-packs for \$3.99 at select grocery stores. Other favorites include grumpy cake – like a Sander's bumpy cake – seasonal favorites like salted caramel and cranberry orange, and the famous “fat Elvis” – banana cake topped with peanut butter cream frosting and dipped in ganache.

The flavors are a playground for Turkin and her staff of 75 employees or so. “We play with that kind of stuff all the time. We get inspired by all kinds of things.”

For example, Turkin had a peanut butter cheesecake dessert in New York, which led to the creation of a peanut butter cheesecake cupcake.

Just Baked also offers cupcakes with company logos and other custom orders. “We think about what it's going to look like (as we create flavors) because we know presentation is really important,” Turkin says. “It's more of a ‘wow’ factor.”

What makes Just Baked so successful? Turkin gives a lot of credit to the Livonia neighborhood where the business started. “People were just happy to see a business in that area” and came out in droves to support Just Baked, Turkin says.

What's more, the cupcakes are good, Turkin says. “I do believe we make the best cupcakes in the country.” They have real ingredients and no trans fats, and people find that refreshing, she says.

Just Baked has a couple franchise locations right now, and she says she views those more as neighborhood retailers than bakeries. The main company bakery makes all the product, and the corporate locations – Ann Arbor, Royal Oak, Brighton, Novi, Livonia and soon Grosse Pointe – along with the franchise locations – Canton, Troy and soon Southgate – get the goods to more customers.

Similarly, Turkin views Just Baked's expansion into grocery stores as a “really big testing ground.” It's a way to gauge demand for the flavors they make, and expand sales at the same time.

Learn more about Just Baked at [www.justbakedshopp.com](http://www.justbakedshopp.com).