

Pastry prowess

Cupcake shop savors sweet smell of success

By Karen Smith • STAFF WRITER • December 26, 2010

Pam Turkin didn't plan to open a retail cupcake shop.

But one day, while baking gourmet cupcakes to sell wholesale to small markets, she found an "open" sign left behind by the previous tenants of the Livonia building where she was working and stuck it in the window.

"People just came in," she said, adding she sold 42 cupcakes at \$2 a piece that first day, Jan. 11, 2009.

Nearly two years later, Turkin and her husband, Todd, of Farmington Hills have five retail stores: Livonia, Canton, Novi (in Twelve Oaks Mall near Nordstroms), Royal Oak and Ann Arbor.

They bake 2,800 cupcakes a day, or 85,000 a month. And they've grown from two employees to 65. Pam's mother, Adele Rosen of West Bloomfield, is a silent partner in the [business](#).

At a time when many businesses are struggling or folding, the Turkins' business has grown faster than a cupcake rises while baking. And, they've been profitable from day one.

What's their recipe for [success](#)? Flexibility is one ingredient, Turkin said.

INTUITION

"We've listened to the business, and we've listened to ourselves," said Turkin, explaining they don't strictly follow a pre-determined [business plan](#) or take other people's advice when it doesn't make sense to them.

Just Baked was going to be a wholesale business, with Todd running it and Pam staying in her [marketing job](#).

But about two months after that fateful day in January, Pam quit her job to work full time in the business. "We just got that busy that fast," she said.

The Turkins started the business after Pam saw how popular cupcakes were while traveling for her

marketing job. She said they picked the idea for the business, then taught themselves to bake cupcakes, trying new flavors on family and friends. Before long, people were asking them to make cupcakes for parties.

Demand grew and before long the Turkins needed to rent a commercial kitchen so they leased the former Burkhardt's Bakery on Seven Mile, just east of Farmington Road, in Livonia in December 2008.

They also scrapped the name Motor City Cupcakes when the Realtor who found them the Burkhardt building told them he hated the name. They had already paid "a fortune" to a man in California for designing a logo with that name.

Pam came up with the name Just Baked, which their five teenaged children said they shouldn't use because of the slang meaning of "baked" being drunk or high.

"My kids thought we were clueless," Pam said. But it turned out to be good for marketing. Soon after the Just Baked sign went up, teens and young adults from the area started coming up to Just Baked just to get pictures of themselves underneath the sign.

For older customers, the name conveys how fresh the products are. "Nothing in the store is more than 30 hours old," Turkin said.

As they were starting out, well-meaning people suggested they try selling their cupcakes to large grocery stores. But they chose baby steps instead and sold to small markets.

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"When I say baby steps, I mean baby steps," Turkin said. Just this month, they got their first shipment of ribbon with the Just Baked name on it. "Everything excites us," she said as she and some employees oohed and aahed while pulling the ribbon from the box.

As they made money, they reinvested in the business. "If we had a good week, we bought a mixer. If we had another good week, we bought a refrigerator," Turkin said.

Another key ingredient to their success? "I think you have to be really dedicated and love what you do," she said. Pam has been putting in 80-100 hour weeks. "Sometimes it gets overwhelming."

Pam's marketing background has also been an asset. "I use everything I ever learned in every job I ever had in this business, and I'm still learning," she said.

She sought out mentors — Jack Erinson, owner of Garden Fresh Salsa in Ferndale, and David Brandon, CEO of Dominos Pizza. She said she direct-messaged Erinson, and the next day she was in his building. "Most people inherently want to help," she said.

BUSINESS PRO

But Pam herself has good business sense, according to Just Baked general manager Janet Douglas of Livonia, who started out as counter help at the Novi store. "She's amazing," Douglas said. "She's very energetic. We just work until we get everything perfect."

Just Baked specializes in unique cupcake flavors — there are nearly 75 now. Recently, it introduced cupcakes tasting like Faygo pop. "We're always playing with flavors," Pam said, adding many of them are in keeping with the season.

The Turkins opened up their newest store on Ford Road in Canton earlier this month under their first-ever licensing agreement. If that model works for them, there will be more.

"We definitely want to go east," Pam said, naming Troy, Sterling Heights and Shelby Township as possible locations. Other areas for possible expansion include Brighton and Dearborn Heights.

In addition, they're planning to sell wholesale to the

food service industry, including restaurants, banquet halls and schools.

The bakery, which also sells brownies, cookies, cakes, scones, granola, cakes and more, is also starting to do cupcake "chips," similar to bagel chips, to cut down on waste.

They'll never leave Livonia, Pam said, where residents gave them their start in retail, buying up those first cupcakes and spreading the word about them. "I'm really grateful to the neighbors," she said.

About two months ago, they moved their Livonia retail operations to a storefront across the street from the bakery because they needed more space for baking. Everything they sell is made in the Livonia bakery, which operates now with three shifts.

Katie Sieracki of Livonia, who has a certificate in baking and pastry from Schoolcraft College, is head baker. "I think it's great how much we've grown," said Sieracki, who is charged with figuring out how to increase the kitchen's production with each new business expansion.

But as fast as they're growing, Pam said customers don't need to fear a drop in **quality**. They still use the same suppliers and have no plans to change — and she's in the kitchen nearly every day overseeing operations.

"We make everything by hand," she said. "Whether it's 100 or 1,000 cupcakes, we make it all the same."

For more information, visit www.justbakedshop.com

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NO, I have some rules!

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Go-to goodies

What: Just Baked Goods

Where: Livonia (33254 Seven Mile); Ann Arbor (2463 A West Stadium); Canton (41747 Ford Road); Royal Oak (32828 Woodward); Novi (Twelve Oaks Mall).

When: Livonia (9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday) and Canton (10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday).

Why: Provide fresh-baked cupcakes and other goodies, nothing more than 30 hours old.

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