

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

JULY 28 2003

BUSINESS NEWS

Sweet taste of success: Ashland's Kooris cooks up a career with brownies

By Bob Tremblay / News Business Writer

ASHLAND — For chocoholics, the brownie is like the martini of desserts. So many variations, so many flavors, so much satisfaction.

Some connoisseurs prefer “cakey” brownies. Others “fudgy” brownies. Both camps, however, would likely experience cocoa-bean nirvana after consuming one of Emily’s Brownies, which are made, sold wholesale and marketed by Emily Kooris of Ashland.

Her brownies technically fall into the “fudgy” category, but that piece of labeling doesn’t do these sweet creations justice. First, they are outrageously rich. Eating just one should quell the desires of the hardest-core members of the sweet-tooth set. Second, they contain a chocolate intensity that you know comes from ingredients not found in basic brownie mixes.

Finally, the brownies feature flavors bound to elicit “oohs,” “ahs” and salivation from chocolate nation. In addition to regular, these flavors include mocha, Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup, Heath Bar, walnut and white chocolate chip walnut. Calorie counters, stay away, far away.

Since starting her company in April, Kooris already has accumulated 20 clients in MetroWest to whom she sells 25 to 30 dozen brownies a week. “The numbers keep increasing,” she says.

Regulars include Town House Pizza in Ashland, Nick’s Pizza in Ashland, Natalie’s Kitchen in Natick, Holliston Superette in Holliston, The Little Store in Medway, Annie’s Book Stop in Framingham, Java Jim’s in Natick, Coffee Haven in Holliston, Peter’s Pizza in Wellesley and Harrington’s in Wellesley.

Customer comments include “the best I’ve ever tasted,” “wicked,” “orgasmic” and “sinful.”

And just think, this all began with a homework assignment.

“I was working as a restaurant manager. I did that for about 10 years, but I wanted to get into the creative side of it,” says Kooris. “I always liked baking. My mother and grandmother baked, and everybody was always making these incredible things.”

To further her baking skills, Kooris enrolled in the Cambridge Culinary School this past spring. “I really enjoyed it,” she says. “We did cooking and baking, but I preferred the baking. I had an assignment to come up with a brownie recipe so I called my aunt, Doris Tartakoff, who used to own a cafe in West Hartford, Conn., with my uncle Dick. Her brownie was a big seller at her place so I used her recipe to make my brownies.”

“As a test, I brought the brownies to a friend’s birthday party and people went nuts over them. They loved them. I also brought them to my pastry instructor, Stacey Brown, to try, and she thought they were really good, too.”

The reaction was so favorable, in fact, that Kooris decided to try to sell them to MetroWest businesses.

“I started going around to local places — pizza shops, convenience stores, gourmet shops,” Kooris recalls. “They would try the sample. They would love the sample. Then they would buy a dozen and a dozen would turn into two dozen and two dozen would turn into three dozen. Then they started ordering them on a regular basis.”

And a brownie business was born. So what makes Emily’s version so special? “I describe it as a cross between a brownie and a piece of fudge,” says

Kooris. As for the recipe, she will not divulge it. All she will say is she uses only the best ingredients and that not all of them are found in the common brownie.

For the record, Kooris bakes all her brownies in a licensed residential kitchen sanctioned by the state Department of Public Health.

Kooris used to bake her brownies every day. Now she does so every other day, typically producing 12 dozen a pop from 6 to 9 a.m. But baking is only part of the job. She also wraps and labels each brownie. “That’s the most time-consuming part,” she says. “I have to put an ingredients sticker on the back and the logo on the front.”

That logo — a woman holding a plate of brownies — was found by Kooris in a 1950s cookbook. That the book was for meatloaf didn’t faze her. She simply replaced the meatloaf pictured on the plate with brownies.

After baking her squares of chocolate pleasure, Kooris delivers them. That takes her up to lunchtime. After lunch, she brings samples to potential customers.

“Some places I call, but most places I walk in cold and leave a sample for the owner,” she says. “Then I call back the owner within two days. Very few have said no. Those who do already make their own brownies or already have a vendor.” In places that sell rival brownies, Emily’s triumph, she says.

After she finishes shopping her wares, Kooris wraps and labels them from 6 to 8 p.m. One retails for between \$1.75 and \$2. “That’s maybe 25 cents more than other brownies, but it’s a better brownie because of the quality ingredients.” And quality typically doesn’t come cheap.

For the future, Kooris is looking to expand her product line. She already has one chocolate chip cookie account and hopes to add a raspberry cheesecake bar and a turtle brownie bar.

While her aunt provided the original brownie recipe, Kooris has created all the different flavors herself. No ingredient failures either. “Everything has worked as long I stick with the standard recipe,” she says. “I want to keep everything kind of basic. Nothing too gourmet or fancy.”

Just ridiculously delicious.

EMILY’S BROWNIES

Owner: Emily Kooris

Employees: 1

Industry: Desserts

Company background: Emily’s Brownies is an Ashland-based company that makes and sells homemade brownies wholesale to area businesses. Her phone number is 508-881-3809.