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A 'sweet' dream come true

by Erin Fay

Vanilla sea salt caramel brownies. Peanut butter chocolate chunk cookies. Chocolate almond toffee. Just reading the names of the baked goods offered at the Harvard Sweet Boutique is enough to make your mouth water. This gourmet baking company has steadily gained a following since its inception in 2007. Now that the company has its first brick-and-mortar store, the baked goods are more popular than ever, thanks to the efforts of its founder, Harvard entrepreneur Sue George.

From mail-order to retail bakery

George, a "self-taught" baker, started the company as a mail-order business in January 2007 after leaving her job as a software engineer. "I was baking all the time—for every fundraiser, every event in town, I would bake something. When my kids were old enough, I thought I'd venture out and try to do something that would allow me to still spend time with them but also do something creative." She began the company by testing out recipes in her home. Then, she was baking, packing, and shipping her baked goods from a kitchen area that she shared with a catering company. After years of hard work, the mail-order business grew to the point that George needed more space. On November 30, 2012, the new retail bakery at 25 South Street in Hudson opened with a ribbon cutting ceremony.



"It was the best move because not only does it bring people in for the baked goods, but it also helps people realize that I have a mail-order business as well." Having her own store means that George can also serve baked goods that don't have to be shipped. This includes baked goods that are fragile or require refrigeration, such as cupcakes, cakes, breakfast pastries, scones, and muffins. George has even begun to serve savory treats such as focaccia bread, soups, and spicy Szechuan noodles.

A growing clientele

The Harvard Sweet Boutique has gained quite a following over the years. On the Rachel Ray Show, a gift box was featured as the "snack of the day." Boston

Sue George with some of her packaged Sweet Boutique treats. (Photo by Lisa Aciukewcz)

480 followers on Twitter or the photos of its baked goods that people have posted on Instagram.

Magazine raved about its brownies. The Huffington Post called the Harvard Sweet Boutique "the most incredible bakery we've ever sampled." And you can't forget the

George explained that while the Harvard Sweet Boutique will always have the cookies, brownies, and toffee that it is known for, she and her staff of pastry chefs are still determining what standard baked goods they will feature. When asked what she felt were strong contenders, she replied, "We have a darn good cream puff and éclair now. Our homemade PopTarts are certainly getting to be well known as well."

Low carb and gluten free

The bakery also features low-carb and gluten-free sweets. The gluten-free treats came about due to the high demand. George explains, "I was doing farmers' markets, and every other customer walked up and said, 'Do you have anything gluten free?' and I said, 'Sorry, no.'" Eventually I said, 'Okay. This is a real need.' I spent a few weeks developing recipes and coming up with some good stuff, and it really took off."

Her low-carb treats came about from her personal experience as a Type 1 diabetic. George must calculate the carbs in everything she consumes so that she can pump in the correct amount of insulin to control her blood sugar. Though Type 1 diabetes is usually seen in children, George was diagnosed when she was 39 years old.

"For me, being on insulin means I need to know the carb content of everything I eat. It's all about knowledge of what the carb content is. I worked with my doctor at the Joslin Diabetes Center as well as a nutritionist there. We came up with what we thought would be a good equation for a lower carb alternative." All low-carb baked goods come with the carb content information to make it easier for diabetics.

'Don't fear taking risks'

However, that's not the only way George gives back. Right now, she is selling cookies decorated with "Boston Strong" to benefit the One Fund Boston. She is also going to participate in the upcoming charity event Boston Bakes for Breast Cancer. For this event, over 300 restaurants in the Boston area and adjoining areas will select a special dessert to feature in their shop. They heavily promote the product and explain that all proceeds go to Boston Bakes, where 99 percent of what they raise is sent to Dana Farber for breast cancer research.

When asked if she had any advice for aspiring entrepreneurs, George said, "Don't be afraid to take risks. I take a lot of risks. I say 'I'll do anything once.' And then learn from your mistakes, because, boy, you'll make mistakes. But you do have to be willing to stick your neck out."

Visit the Sweet Boutique website at harvardsweetboutique.com.