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Milton cookie business has healthy edge

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By Roger Hillis
Coast Press Reporter

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Health nuts, rejoice. There is a new cookie on the market designed just for you, and it's produced locally.

Bella's Cookies is a line of such snacks, actually. Kelly and Mark Leishear of Milton named their new business after their 4-year-old daughter, Bella.

A planned line of home-baked breads will be named for their 2-year-old son, Liam.

Kelly Leishear said too many of today's popular snack foods for children are loaded with non-healthy ingredients. The goal with Bella's Cookies was to make products with healthy ingredients that still taste good -- thus, appealing to the adult market as well.

"I've always been interested in organic foods," Leishear said. "I tried the cookies they sell at the health-food stores, but they just weren't cutting it. They were too dry."

Leishear took matters into her hands -- and oven.

"They're still cookies, but I don't use any artificial colors or genetically-modified ingredients," she said. "Eventually, I'd like to make some low-fat or gluten-free cookies, but I don't want to use any artificial sugar."

"I think a lot of people would like to eat healthier, but they're forced to eat things like fastfood because of convenience. They don't have a lot of time."

In July, the Leishears began selling their Champion Chunk cookie at the Cape May-Lewes Ferry Green Market in Lewes on Saturdays. On Aug. 20, they unveiled a second cookie, the Choco-Bomb. They'll be selling their wares there for the last time this summer on Saturday, Sept. 3, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The 6.6-ounce packages contain two cookies, and retail for \$3.50.

"It's been absolutely great (at the ferry)," Leishear said. "I've been bringing about 100 packs every week, which is the most I can fit in my little

BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

NAME: Bella's Cookies

OWNERS: Kelly and Mark Leishear of Milton

SPECIALTY: Organic cookies and snacks

AVAILABLE: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 3, Cape May-Lewes Ferry Green Market, Lewes

CALL: 684-8152

WEB: www.bellascookies.com

refrigerator. They always sell out and then I have to go home and get more.

"I recommend that people keep the cookies in their refrigerator or freezer so they'll last longer. I also think they taste best when they're cold."

Name-brand cookies available on most store shelves can stay fresh for as long as a year, due to the use of preservatives.

Leishear has also sold the cookies at a more unlikely location -- the often rowdy Bottle & Cork nightclub in Dewey Beach. However, she chose Monday evenings, when the older set comes out to hear the golden oldies played by the Fabulous Greaseband. "We'd pass out 100 free cookies at about 8:30 at night, when everyone was filing in," she said. "We're just trying to get the name out there. Hopefully we'll be at the Sea Witch Festival (in downtown Rehoboth Beach) in October."

While the Leishears don't currently open their Milton home to the public to sell their products, that will change in October. "We're building a commercial kitchen on the back of our property," Leishear said. "I'm at capacity now, trying to keep up with the demand."

Also next month, the Leishears hope to begin conducting online sales. Leishear said she plans to approach Cape Henlopen School District officials at some point about considering her products (or those of other health-oriented companies) for student lunches. "I think it would be great if the kids could drink organic milk at school," she said.

Vegan breakfast items, including lemon-blueberry and pumpkin-cranberry muffins have already been perfected and will soon be for sale. "We gave them to the girls at the Miss Delaware pageant and they loved them," Leishear said. "A lot of the other muffins out there don't have any fiber. They're full of carbs, fat and refined sugar."

The upcoming bread line is slated to include cheese-chive and sweet-beer bread. As for other future items, the sky is the limit.

"In the beginning, I just gave the cookies away to friends. I've baked wedding cakes before, but this is my first commercial business," Leishear said. "I'm from a big, Italian family. I like to cook."

- E-mail Roger Hillis at rhillis@gannett.com

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