

## 'Clean cookies' taste good naturally

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Kelly Leishear wanted her children to grow up eating healthy, all-natural and organic foods. But she also wanted them to be kids -- complete with enormous sweet teeth.

Finding little in the way of sweet treats made with healthful ingredients, she decided to make her own. After 75 tries, she created a chocolate chip cookie using all-natural chocolate, organic flour, organic canola oil and brown rice syrup -- an instant hit with her children, Bella, 4, and Liam, 2.

"It's just a clean cookie, is what I like to say," said Leishear, a stay-at-home mom in Milton with degrees in dietetics and exercise science and a family history in food service.

The cookie, Champion Chunk, was soon being requested by other parents.

The result was Bella's Cookies, Delaware's first all-natural and organic cookie company. The theory behind the company is that artificial ingredients and preservatives shouldn't go in anyone's body, especially not a young, growing one. Their slogan: "Treat Yourself Right."

"It's all built around the health of children," said Mark Leishear, Kelly's husband and the company's part-time marketing manager. "We're setting out to debunk the myth that cookies made with healthful ingredients have to taste bad."

In fact, he does constant blind taste tests with clients and strangers, placing the cookies up against national commercially successful competitors to make sure their recipes stand up.

Even without the research, the Leishears figured their cookies were liked. They opened for business this past summer with a booth at the Cape May-Lewes Ferry Green Market in Lewes. They sold out every week.

They expect the same effect when they take the products to the retail world later this year. The Leishears hope to sell to health food stores and local food outlets.

The idea sounds good to Gina Cimino, who does marketing for Newark Natural Foods in Newark.

"It's hard to find homemade, tastes-great, organic cookies," Cimino said. "We do like to carry locally made items."



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Four-year-old Bella Leishear, for whom Bella's Cookies are named, samples one of the organic treats at her family's home in Milton.

### FYI

The three varieties of Bella's Cookies -- Champion Chunk, Choco Bomb and Hunky-Punky -- are available only by special order by calling 684-8152.

If taste weren't enough, there's quirky packaging. Each package features a picture of the couple's daughter, Bella, for whom the company is named, on the outside and a creative story of the cookies' origin on the inside. For example, Hunky-Punky, a cookie made with pumpkin and candied ginger, has a story that is a cross between Henny Penny and Pinocchio with a pumpkin-turned-cookie hero.

"We write them so they're fun," Mark Leishear said. "It adds something extra."

With the construction of a new commercial kitchen under way, the Leishears plan to bring their cookies to the masses. "There's no end to the cookies we're going to put out," Mark Leishear said.

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