

Chocolate entrepreneur blends tasty concoctions for Eugene 'chocoholics'

By Julie Shippen
Of the Emerald

One could say that Janele Smith is in the business of making people fat.

It may not have been her original intention when she opened shop a year and a half ago, but the obvious delight Smith takes in seeing the sweet-toothed individual contentedly indulged is enough to invoke speculation.

As sole proprietor of Fenton & Lee fine chocolates — the latest chocoholic craze to hit the area since the Monster Cookie — this spry woman takes great pride in making some of the Northwest's most delectable confections.

Smith's preface to the chocolate-making business began as a leisurely interest. "It was a hobby when I was a preschool teacher," she admits.

But hobbies sometimes have the tendency to blossom into full-time occupations and with a little encouragement from her family, friends and others in the business, Smith entered into the chocolate-making profession.

"It's very time consuming. I think that was the biggest shock of leaving

teaching and realizing how much time it really takes," she says of business management. "I do have Sundays off right now," Smith adds with a note of firm resolution.

She estimates spending anywhere from 50 to 60 hours a week at the new Fenton & Lee shop on 13th Avenue, beginning early every morning melting chocolate and preparing fruit-and-nut centers and finishing the day in her office with the bookwork, she says.

And in between those hours, Smith plays the roles of dishwasher, sweeper, sales representative and retailer. She has some assistance, however, in the form of four part-time people who help her dip, pour and pack the chocolates.

Hired help includes her two teen-age sons, whose middle names were the inspiration for the business's name. Apparently they have no objections to working every day after school at their mother's shop.

For a business only halfway into its second year, the staff size makes its own statement of success. "We have doubled (profits) in the first year," she says



Photo by Michael Clapp

Janele Smith mixes up another tasty batch of Fenton & Lee chocolates for sugar junkies throughout the Northwest.

matter-of-factly.

Fenton & Lee now has around 25 outlets in Oregon and Washington, and Smith says the number grows with every passing week. Local retail outlets include Reed & Cross, Valentine's and the recent addition of the EMU Main Desk, where the chocolates have caught on well despite the per-chocolate price of 35 cents to \$1.

"I think students think they're expensive, but they buy them anyway," says one of the Main-Desk employees who prefers to remain anonymous. Apparently the end outweighs the means, but not without reason, she says. "You're getting a good quality chocolate, plus it's made in Oregon."

One of Smith's secrets is that she uses locally-grown ingredients in her chocolates, which include strawberries, apples, apricots, pears and an equal variety of nuts that she roasts herself.

Specialties include the Strawberry Frost, made of quick-dried berries dipped in milk chocolate and again in white chocolate; Hazelnut Crowns, of crisp nuts set in molds of dark and light chocolate; Orange and Apricot Glaces, made of fruit slices dipped in chocolate that look as good as they taste.

Smith also works with special mold shapes, such as two sizes of hearts wrapped in gold foil, seashells made of minted chocolate, and ducks cast from

an antique mold her sons talked her into buying.

All together, Fenton & Lee produces about a dozen different types of fixes for the chocoholic, and Smith plans to add a caramel to the list, she says.

Chocolates are also sold in boxed amounts that run \$4.98 for a 6-ounce selection and \$13.50 for the 1-pound size. It was these seasonally offered gift packages that kicked off Smith's career, as her chocolates were sold mostly by wholesale from the company's original location behind Pasta Plus on 11th Avenue.

Though she spends entire days melting, dipping and pouring chocolate, Smith says she is quite able to keep her fingers out of the pots, and her self-indulgence is only occasional.

"I go on binges," she says. One of Smith's part-timers, however, pipes up with a different story on the matter.

"I've never seen you eat a chocolate since I've known you," says Jane Wagner, who is busy rolling fruit-and-nut balls. "When you see 50 pounds at a time, it's hard to think of eating it," she explains.

Smith's family, on the other hand, can always find room for sampling. "They have daily doses. They have to stop by and get their fixes."

Her son, Nathaniel, is already on his way over for one.

Caucus explores 'gender gap'

The so-called gender gap can be a powerful tool to gain political leverage for women in both parties this year, say organizers of the Oregon Women's Caucus state convention to be held at the Eugene Hilton Saturday.

The gender gap refers to the differences in voting patterns between men and women, says caucus member Deborah Romerein. For example, she says, a recent poll by CBS and the New York Times showed there was a 24 percent difference in responses when Republican men and women were asked if they thought Pres. Ronald Reagan should be elected for a second term.

Alice Travis, the National Women's

Political Caucus's representative to the Democratic national convention, will give the keynote address. Other speakers will include state Sen. Margie Hendriksen, D-Eugene, and state Rep. Mary Burrows, R-Eugene.

The caucus is bipartisan, and the convention will cover strategies for gaining political influence for woman in both parties.

The convention begins at 9:30 a.m. and will run until 6:30 p.m. A fee of \$35, \$30 for caucus members, covers lunch, a reception and entertainment by local feminist comedians.

For more information, contact Cheryl Hunter at 747-9935 or Margo Schaefer at 342-2240.

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