

The Great Unbaked: Raw chocolate business a sweet addition to the Applegate

BY LAIRD FUNK

Raw, unroasted chocolate? What? That might have been all that Wade and Jennifer Davis would have had to say about the subject 20-some years ago when they, like many neighbors, moved here from southern California. Even later, when Wade became a successful concrete contractor in our area and Jennifer was a stay-at-home mom, it might have still been a puzzle.

But while Wade was setting forms and finishing concrete, Jennifer was starting to look for healthy alternatives to the sugary desserts and snacks her kids clamored for. While experimenting, she came upon the subject of raw chocolate, chocolate unlike the standard commercial offerings. All commercial chocolate, even the healthier dark chocolate, is roasted or heated above 118 degrees, a temperature above which, Jennifer believes, some of the nutrients are lost.

Through her experiments Jennifer learned that raw chocolate, while a superior choice, was sometimes temperamental to work with, with missteps resulting in a bitter product. But it wasn't long before Jennifer was turning out chocolate goodies that were delicious and liked by all who tried them. Eschewing refined sugars, she opted for sweeteners like coconut nectar, palm sugar, raw agave nectar, maple syrup, and yacón syrup from the Philippines, Indonesia, and South America.

After the 2009 economic mess lessened the need for concrete, Jennifer decided to make her chocolate hobby a business, calling it "The Great Unbaked New Raw Chocolate Factory," and selling her creations to the public. She created a certified kitchen in her home and started making goodies on a bigger scale, but she needed more chocolate.

She found she could not use just any cocoa beans because, while the beans were considered raw, they still might have been subjected to temperatures over 118 degrees during the fermentation and drying process used to

prepare the beans for market. Seeking suppliers who monitored their process more carefully and kept the temperature down, she now brings in chocolate from small family processors in Ecuador, Bali and the Dominican Republic.

While sales may have been a bit slow to begin with, the quality and flavor of the chocolate creations soon made friends and customers for the company wherever they were marketed. Starting by wholesaling to local retailers, Jennifer steadily built the business and increased production of her sweet offerings. Now her "Great Unbaked" line of products is found in most health-food stores in the Applegate Valley, Ashland, Grants Pass, and even in California, Texas, and New York. Sending out sample packs to likely outlets has spurred sales significantly.

Business was so good that it soon outgrew her house and its small certified kitchen. While searching for more space for her equipment and new employees, she thought of the building that had been Myron Meehan's cabinet shop just east of Murphy. They had been using part of it as a warehouse for Wade's business, but those days were done. The building was spacious and in a good location, but it was still an industrial space not suitable for a commercial food producer. That didn't stop Jennifer.

She and Wade gutted the interior, moved out the resident bats in the ceiling, and began building. Dividing up the space, they created an amazing commercial kitchen as big as some houses and equipped it with everything they needed to produce the quantities of chocolate they envisioned. Bright and roomy, the space features gleaming stainless-steel work surfaces, skylights for lighting, refrigerators, storage spaces, and the pride of the place: a grinder that holds 65 pounds of chocolate at a time.

They also made spaces for an office and their newly launched retail sales endeavor. Stepping in, you are greeted

by the smell of chocolate and a wonderful display of their products: the now famous truffles are joined by delicious seasonal candies, chocolate syrup, hot chocolate mix, and even an unbaked chocolate-dipped brownie made with nut flours.

Jennifer appreciates her location on the Applegate Wine Trail, and sees her chocolates as a nice addition to the local wines and other specialty agricultural products being offered in our valley. Myron Meehan might be surprised at the changes to his shop, but I suspect he'd like the chocolate just fine.

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The Great Unbaked New Raw Chocolate Factory is located at 8880 Williams Highway, Unit B, Grants Pass, OR. Phone: 541-450-9080.



Photos, top: A very recognizable storefront with a "chocolate" mural by John Michener. Bottom: The retail space where customers are greeted by the fragrance of an abundance of chocolate products made by owner Jennifer Davis.

The community of Williams

BY GABRIELA EAGLESOME

If people chose *not* to participate, donate, or give freely of their time and energy, Applegate Valley communities like Williams would look a lot different. In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, Jimmy Stewart is about to jump off a bridge, but an angel intervenes. The angel shows him that he made a difference and flashes a world before his eyes that would have been an awful place had he not been in it. Without public engagement our communities would similarly lack warmth and welcoming qualities.

Although communities experience friction, public interaction reduces conflicts and misunderstandings. Neighbors squabbling over a fence, an eyesore or noise, can easily find themselves helping another family put their lives together after a fire. Working for the good of a community smooths over personal differences and helps people shift their perceptions from insular to communal.

An institution's health and longevity depend on the people behind it, and its ability to retain volunteers and attract participants. Some initiatives begin with great enthusiasm and eventually peter out. Many people regret the demise of the Williams newsletter, for example. Others become part of the culture, like the Williams' Grange, which is supported by many volunteers, some of whom have been working at the number one community gathering, the Pancake

Breakfast, for almost 20 years. Their fortitude is to be applauded. It isn't easy to organize such a big operation.

The beauty of the Pancake Breakfast is that it brings disparate community members together and simultaneously raises money for the grange to continue to provide a public space. Brian Barton, a Pancake Breakfast volunteer, Grange Master, and maintenance go-to guy, directly interfaces with the public. He frequently greets people at the intake window for the breakfast food orders. He hears many suggestions and complaints by people following their natural instinct to improve or critique the world around them. Brian's response is often, "When is the last time you volunteered here?" A casual observer might have good ideas. But as a volunteer it might be more apparent why not to implement them. Also, as a volunteer, it is easy to see that there are rewards, such as interacting with other people. The drawbacks include being in the public eye and thus open to scrutiny. A volunteer can appreciate the grind of showing up, even when that is not convenient, or the feeling of burnout, when the repeated effort does not seem worthwhile anymore.

In this age of the Internet, community work transpires via Jo's List, an electronic email list that circulates far beyond Williams, and two Facebook groups. The community feels connected

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