

When she needed to make a career change, Tanya Kerner decided to make a business out of something she loved to do: bake and cook for other people. Kerner started Critelli Sweets in July out of her Dallas home.

JOLENE GUZMAN
/Itemizer-ObsERVER



Something sweet?

Critelli Sweets in Dallas offers homemade baked goods and candy with the touch of a family tradition

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-ObsERVER

DALLAS — Tanya Kerner decided to take her own advice.

After a lifetime of experience with her father's gift for cooking Italian food that would bring the neighbors knocking when they smelled the garlic in the air, Kerner asked him, "Why don't you open a restaurant?"

Her father didn't take the question seriously, but with the popularity of chain Italian restaurants now, perhaps he should have.

When faced with her own career crossroads last year, she thought back to that conversation.

She and her husband, Mike, adopted her grandson, Spencer, and he needed her home more often than her traveling marketing job allowed. She also faced a temporary health crisis and knew it was time for a change.

Mike gave her a piece of advice: "In that process of healing, my husband said, 'so what is it that you want to do? You've got to do something, and it should be

A taste of home

What: Critelli Sweets home bakery in Dallas.

Contact and menu: www.critellisweets.com; 503-420-4241; or critellisweets@gmail.com.

Find Critelli Sweets at: Polk County Bounty Market and Independence Riverview Market.

something you like."

She contemplated that for a while.

"What I'd like to do, I just liked it because it was fun. That's baking and fixing food for my family and friends," she said. "I said I don't know if I can make any money at it or grow a business out of it."

Kerner decided to take the chance.

"I should take the advice I gave my dad and try to do something," she recalled thinking.

Kerner didn't open a restaurant, but a home bakery out of the couple's Dallas residence. She gave it a name that would sound familiar to the fans of her fa-



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Critelli Sweets makes something for every treat lover, including cakes, cupcakes, candy, scones and muffins.

ther's food: Critelli Sweets. Critelli is her maiden name.

She said baking was the easiest way to start because she could do it at home and

it saved the investment cost of opening a store.

Critelli Sweets has something for every sweet tooth, including cupcakes, frosting, cookies, scones, muffins and fruit breads, bread and candy. Kerner also makes salads and side dishes to order.

She launched the business in July and is taking another step this spring, setting up a food cart.

Once the cart is remodeled and approved, Critelli Sweets will be at Polk County Bounty Market in Dallas on Thursdays and Independence Riverview Market on Saturdays. Kerner may attend events in the Salem area.

In addition to her baked goods, she will be serving her father's famous meatballs in sub sandwiches. Kerner worked at perfecting the recipe until it "tasted like home."

Kerner also will serve lasagna and Chicago-style Italian hot dogs.

"That will be our baby step, and we will see how it turns out — if it is worth growing into a brick-and-mortar or if we want to just

make that the business," Kerner said.

She'll have a learning curve on how much to make for each event she attends, but Kerner has testing new recipes down to a science.

Spencer, 7, is the main taste-tester. Picky by nature, if he likes a recipe, chances are everyone else will, too, Kerner said.

If that doesn't provide the feedback Kerner needs, she's learned to read people's reactions when they take a first bite.

"Our baked goods, when they take a bite of it, it's like their mouth registers and then their eyes," she said. "That's how I rate if I want to keep a recipe or not, I really, truly watch their face. Their face will tell me more than their words do."

Kerner admits to having done plenty of her own "research" since starting Critelli Sweets, but she can't pick a favorite off the menu.

"Since I started doing it all the time, you can tell I love it all — I gained 20 pounds," she said, smiling. "I've got to learn how to take smaller tastes or something."

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