

Living



Business Enterprises, New
 'Kitchen' industry
 9-21-85
 fattens the county

By MARYBETH VARCADOS
 Living Section Editor

THEY SEEK a formula of success — their pie in the sky, with whipped cream. Right now, not by and by. A la mode.

In their right hands, they hold recipes, maybe two or three. In the left, calling cards, boasting the qualities of their cakes and pies and candies or cookies, burritos or salsa.

These enterprising cooks emerge as a sort of cottage industry in this county already chubby with culinary enterprises.

Some are nurturers. Some want to share grandma's recipe with the world. Others want creative work, or to be their own boss. And they all are willing virtually to go restaurant door to cafe door, deli to coffee house taking orders for their wares.

Simple Simon met a pieman ...
 Going to the fair ...

Is their's a pipe dream? Are they chasing a an elusive pie in the sky? Or will they hit a burrito bonanza. A remunerative ravioli. An advantageous salsa. A champion cheesecake.

Their wares are found locally, sometimes distributed to nearby towns to compete with their mass-produced rivals.

If a local telephone number on the distribution box isn't a give away

go, appearing one week with a irresistible torte or wild mousse, only to disappear the next into fantasies of "making it big."

Their heads are filled with visions of items that *made it* — tofu, freshly squeezed orange juice, mountains of Santa Cruz-brand tortilla chips.

Meanwhile, there's no hot-dogging it for those living the Horatio Alger myth — work hard, keep clean, keep your eye on the main chance, court lady luck and success is yours. They're putting in 50-60 hours some weeks, hoping for cool coastal days so the chocolate won't melt, the ovens won't be oppressive.

Said Simple Simon to the pieman,
 let me taste your ware.
 Said the pieman to Simple Simon,
 show me first your penny ...

SLIDING by is not good enough, says baker Rebecca Campbell, whose Mighty Muffins, with a zing of lemon in the blueberry batter or a carrot cake over the cheesecake batter, appear destined for success. Her secret? Freshness. "In food in this town, the competition is so strong. Everybody has a get-rich-quick scheme. Everything is fresh and baked daily," she says.

Opening your own shop is the dream come true, and Rebecca, who came to California from Nova Scotia for health reasons, says she is on the threshold of opening her own muffin



brand names like Bunny Moon, Black China Bakery or Ducks in Flight Pizza usually are a clue to home-spun roots.

Karol DiGrazia took a chance with her pecan cheesecake, gave up her job in electronics to follow a friend's advice and sell her wonderful desert. Besides turning out Cakes by Karol, she runs a commercial kitchen as a center for these elusive entrepreneurs, some who move, depending on the competitive climate, from kitchen to licensed kitchen. Some start out with Karol, others with caterer Dorothy Wilson, or at Emily's Bakery. More and more commercial kitchens are renting out space as the demand grows.

You can't just cook a mess of grandma's favorite chitterlings at home and peddle 'em door to door because the county health department keeps an eye on things. Health Inspector Ken Mabie says that all cottage industries need business permits in the cities, health permits in the county and proper labels listing ingredients, as required by the state.

"This limited manufacture of food is very popular right now," says Mabie. "Salsa, baked goods — people are conceiving of all sorts of things. When they involve meat, it's more complicated — higher quality testing is required — but you don't see meat in this community as much. People turn to more natural, organic type foods."

Health inspectors also are label readers, and when an unfamiliar name slides into the deli case, the bootleggers are tracked down. "We don't see anything really awful, just oddball. This community attracts all sorts of interesting concepts."

Those without permits come and

shop. Six people work for her full-time, baking 2,000 muffins per night.

"A muffin is a trend food," Rebecca notes. "Capitola and Aptos consume 6,000 muffins a week. One spa takes 300 per delivery. A grocery store may take two dozen."

But success is a double-edged sword — "A business owns you a long time," she adds. "It's hard to find a balance between it and your personal life. But you have to stay in there; the further away you get from your product, the less it is what you started with."

RITA TVEITNES is just starting out. Her secret is her German background — her dirndls, the imported vanilla sugar, measuring by grams, not ounces.

She started a year ago, with her avocado pies — appearing at restaurants with samples and a wishful smile. "I baked them in my kitchen and ran around delivering them without even a box to carry them in! If the health department had ever found out!"

Last summer she went to Germany and returned with her foster mother's recipe book. With daughters grown and husband working over the hill, she's after the big time, with an ambitious order list. She goes from coffee houses to restaurants, giving samples and taking orders for Bienenstich, the almond-custard filled cake she loved as a child, and other German treats. The cakes and pies are baked in a licensed kitchen and delivered around town from her sports car.

Her 16-hour work days have paid off, she says, but "sometimes it's like riding a roller coaster."

GLORIA BERNSTEIN became a grandmother and a "very successful gypsy baker" after age 50, and her Gloria's Pies, made with Watsonville pippins and berries, are delivered all the way to Palo Alto.

"My mother and grandmother were born on homesteads in the Ozarks and as a very little girl I watched my grandmother make apple pies. She served them three times a day, as the pioneers did. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Apple pie was a staple, connected with nurturing and loving."

For 12 years, she ran a nursery school in Menlo park, and later she and her late husband owned a restaurant in Aptos. When she was in her late 50's, he died and, out of necessity, she went into business.

"In this high tech society, people are looking back for something that is real, handmade," she says. Hence, pies. Nurturing pies.

She and her grown children run the business, baking twice a week — 170 pies in all. Her son Lou includes them on his runs as a delivery man.

They're doing so well, Gloria says she is ready for semi-retirement.

THE NEW guy in the field is peddling fudge. Larry Ferguson, who otherwise is in the newspaper delivery business, sold his first fudge in 14 stores last week and made a rousing \$116. Last holiday season, he made \$300 by selling it to friends.

Gloria Bernstein nurtures the world with her pies.

It's just the old-fashioned kind, he says, with real butter and cream and all. What he made as a kid.

It takes half an hour to cook four pounds in his own kitchen, and the wife and kids help him wrap and double wrap.

He's ready to rent space in a licensed kitchen, and he adds, "I'm counting on retiring soon and just do this."

Competition? "I'm not aware of any," he says.

CHOCOLATE is an adult candy, at least in Georgie Fong's eyes. In a commercial space in Soquel, Georgie drips, shapes and wraps hundreds of chocolate-covered almonds in red foil squares. She bought a little television set, to give the kitchen more homey feeling.

Georgie's been turning out Charity's Chocolates for a year. She began shortly after leaving her chemical engineering employment in Palo Alto. Job opportunities for people with her training are scarce in Santa Cruz County, she found, and she wanted to be near home, her husband — who is a Capitola optometrist, and their two sons. So, being a self-proclaimed chocoholic, she wrapped her habit in foil.

"It is high in magnesium, and women need magnesium" is her clinical view — or rationalization? —

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'It's hard to get your money's worth if you don't enjoy it.'

— George Lovelight

'If it would afford me a decent living, I'd be happy. But right now, it isn't. I couldn't support a family on it.'

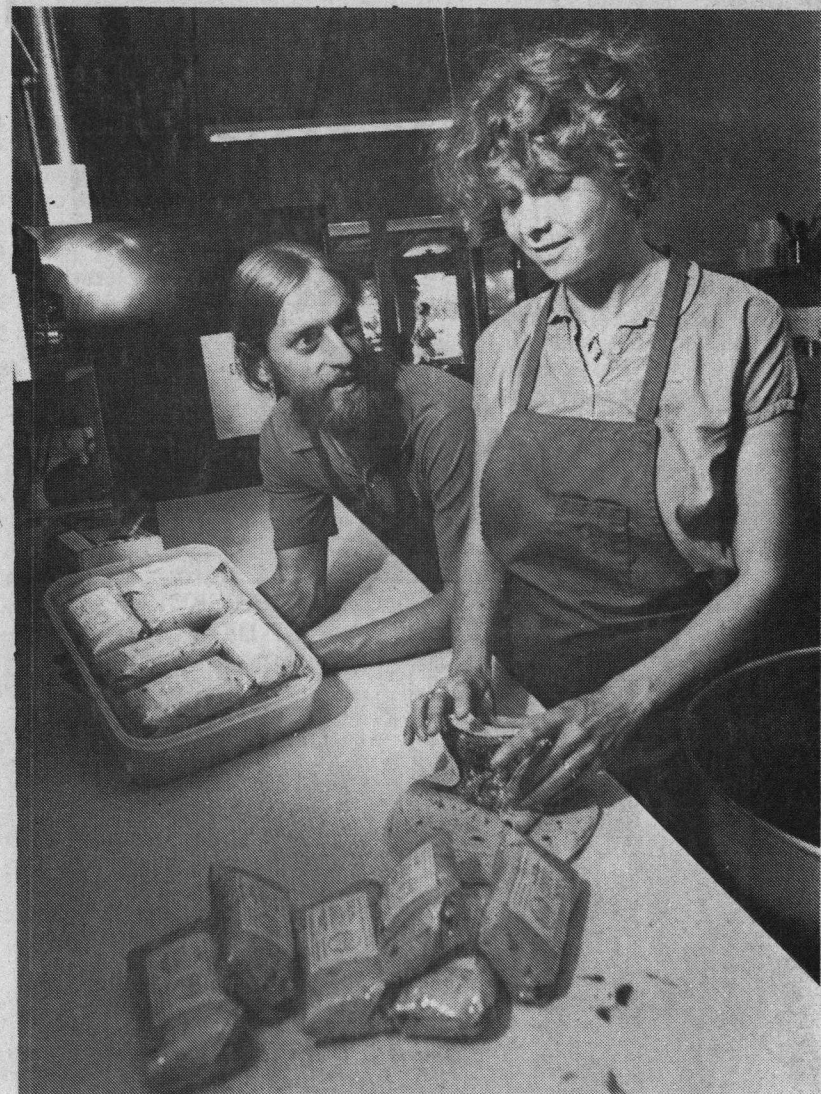
— Patty Bowers

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Patty Bower adds calories to sinful calories.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

George and Michelle Lovelight roll burritos.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Rebecca Campbell's business is mighty.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Georgie Fong profits from chocoholicism. Maria Clowser assembles salsa ingredients.

Pie in the sky

Continued from Page D1 of chocolate. So, it has nutritive merit: "At that certain time of month, a woman's craving for chocolate goes up. The body chemically identifies certain foods with certain ingredients, and since magnesium can't be stored in the body, like calcium can be, the craving for chocolate begins."

Last year, 37 stores in this county and 23 in Carmel and Salinas carried the candies. People eat more chocolate in winter when it's cool, and that's when Georgie's work days span the week, 16 hours a day.

"I think my son gets disgusted, I put so much time in," she admits. "But I like making things, and cooking is what I've done the longest, as a housewife. Now I can work professionally and still cook."

"It makes you nervous when you're in a store and someone buys one and tries it." They're named after her daughter and, you guessed it, the musical heroine Sweet Charity ...

ANTHONY De Muro, who works in catering, came here nine years ago from New Jersey, and started pinning for his grandmother's ravioli. "Whenever a holiday came along, it didn't seem right without some lasagne or ravioli. I got tired of missing it and decided to make my own rather than sit here and listen to myself whine and moan."

So he did. He rolled semolina pasta flat through a machine, filled it with a mixture of ricotta, eggs, parsley and salt — "and a little nutmeg because the label says it's got spices" — and sold some to a local Italian restaurant.

"It's nice because they give me free beers when I deliver."

But he can't make a living on

But, he adds, "If it ever does become a success, it will be the slowest success story ever."

THE recipe for Edward and Maria Clowsers' Numero Uno Salsa came from her mother, Dano, who lives in San Leandro and still makes batches of the salsa to give her grandkids when they come by.

Ed retired 10 years ago from the U.S. Navy and soon found, "You can't just sit around and do nothing." When he and Maria were asked to be bilingual instructional aides in the public school system, the answer was "yes!" Ed works at Pajaro School, Maria at Soquel Elementary.

But their all-time claim to popularity was their salsa. Friends urged them to market it, and in February, 1984, they did, enlisting their own children to help.

Starting with about \$300, they lined up permits, found a kitchen to work in, and scouted out the freshest herbs and best buys on canned tomatoes — and wine vinegar as a natural preservative.

Salsa's great because it doesn't require cooking, says Maria. On Mondays, they prepare the garlic, the parsley, herbs and such. That takes about three hours. On Tuesdays, daughter Chris and Maria assemble the salsa, using an industrial blending "wand" for mixing. That takes about five hours. Their daughter Ann, a housewife and mother, does most of the deliveries — about eight hours of work.

"Our future? Right now we're a family-operated business and we don't want the big time. That would change our whole format. This took our family's blended efforts."

BUNNY MOON. Bunny ears poke up over the moon. It's a

heard, when people look at the moon, they see a bunny making rice cakes.

"Sometimes people think we're Moonies," says Michelle, a former accountant, with a laugh. They are filling and rolling a hefty bean mixture in whole wheat tortillas. The burritos will travel to San Jose with their distributor.

Their line of quick-carry healthy foods yields a comfortable living, they say. "We got into it a year ago," George says. They came to Santa Cruz from Los Angeles seven years ago, "attracted by the laid-back lifestyle."

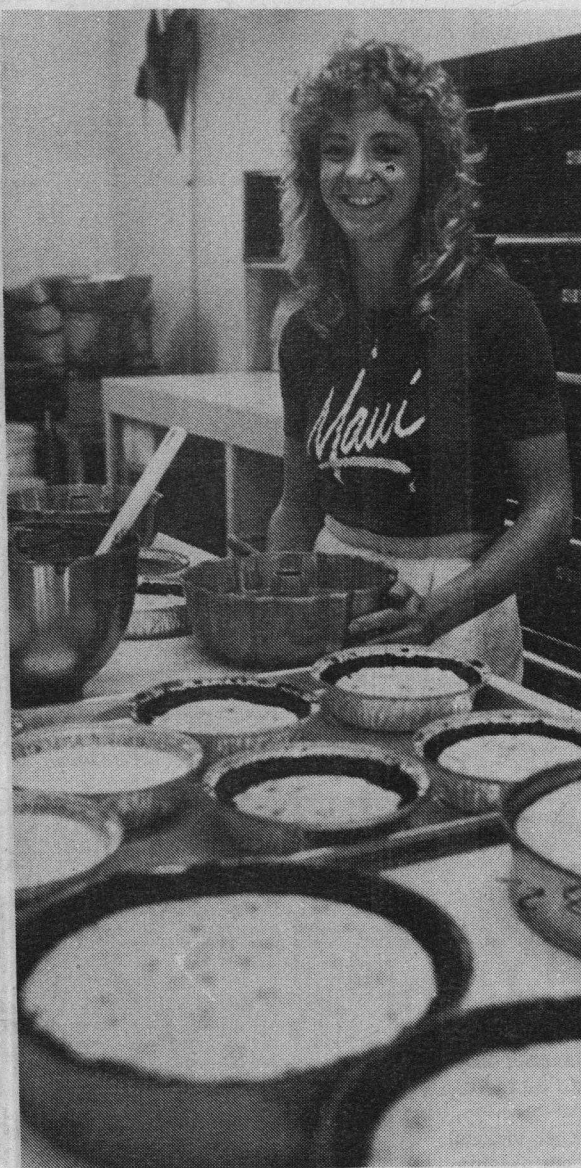
With some catering experience, they answered an ad placed by a local distributor wanting to add new products to his line. "But he backed out and left us all dressed up with no place to go," Michelle remembers. So, with \$300 and feeling scared, they took the plunge. George altered his mother's bran muffin recipe to a whole wheat and honey version; an oatmeal cookie was given a wheatless treatment. "It's hard to get a product that appeals to everybody because of eating restrictions. But what you lose one way, you gain another," says Michelle. They work in the kitchen about 24 hours a week, and wish they had more time to drum up new accounts.

The bean burritos, with a 7-10 day shelf life, have proved a happy invention. "In fact, we're happy with our business. It's more like play for me than work — and it is something we can do together," Michelle adds.

And George philosophizes, "It's hard to get your money's worth if you don't enjoy it."

And, he says, "We're thinking big. After all, Harmony Foods started with two guys tossing granola in a sheet."

WHAT DOES the Black China Bakery have to do



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Karol di Grazia left electronics behind.



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Rita Tveitnes' dirndl is her trademark.

'I probably won't get rich doing this, but I don't know I'm looking to do that. If it would afford me a decent living, I'd be happy. But right now, it isn't. I couldn't support a family on it.'

— Patty Bowers

Now, her cakes appear in gourmet catalogs every year, this being the season for the William Glen catalog out of Sacramento. Last year, she was in the Oakville Grocery catalog out of Sonoma. Nieman Marcus once offered her cakes at \$20.

Patty says she can bake up to 100 large cakes a day — a crystal cake with ginger, pecans and pear liqueur; a cocoa rum cake with glazed Australian orange slices and rum. A chocolate, peanut butter cheesecake. They're expensive to make, and sell for about \$8.50.

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After they parted ways, Patty developed the line of desserts for restaurants from here to Los Gatos. At Christmas time, she goes from two to four baking days a week, and family and friends help her with the packaging and mailing.

Black China? Well, she says, the name sort of grew from China Grade and the black was thrown in for a touch of class.

LIKE OTHER bakers, Karol di Grazia enjoys concocting recipes in her East Cliff kitchen. Her chocolate mousse with cheesecake on the bottom is for

— 20 cakes take her about 10 hours to make and she bakes twice a week — are carried by some chain groceries and restaurants.

"I don't like working for someone else — there's more motivation and self esteem when I'm on my own. There's a lot of potential, but you've got to have money to make money."

"It is a lot of work," she says. "You've got to pound the pavement every day." She drives from Watsonville to Los Gatos in her BMW. One Tuesday morning she delivered 20 cakes to 15 businesses.

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decided to make my own rather than sit here and listen to myself whine and moan."

So he did. He rolled semolina pasta flat through a machine, filled it with a mixture of ricotta, eggs, parsley and salt — "and a little nutmeg because the label says it's got spices" — and sold some to a local Italian restaurant.

"It's nice because they give me free beers when I deliver."

But he can't make a living on ravioli, "and I have the checkbook to prove it," he says, reaching for his back pocket.

"I need someone with dynamic marketing ability who could make a success out of it," he adds.

Tony believes in his ravioli, La Rosa brand, from by his grandmother Genevieve La Rosa's recipe.

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"Our future? Right now we're a family-operated business and we don't want the big time. That would change our whole format. This took our family's blended efforts."

BUNNY MOON. Bunny ears poke up over the moon. It's a copy of a Japanese crest that George Lovelight came across and he thought it would be perfect for the business he and his wife Michelle had tumbled into. After all, George, who was a carpenter in his earlier work life, is writing a book about a bunny. Bunny Moon Natural Foods. Has a ring to it. In Japan, George

tion. "In fact, we're happy with our business. It's more like play for me than work — and it is something we can do together," Michelle adds.

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WHAT DOES the Black China Bakery have to do with Pleasure Point? Nothing, except that's where Patty Bowers and her family have lived for years. Patty raised her children and worked variously as a midwife, teacher's aide and selling women's bathing suits before getting into specialty baking in 1982.

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"I probably won't get rich doing this, but I don't know I'm looking to do that," she says. "If it would afford me a decent living, I'd be happy. But right now, it isn't. I couldn't support a family on it."

Her original partner was making Texas fruitcakes when Patty joined the business in October, 1982, and the goal was to get into "trendy" places.

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LIKE OTHER bakers, Karol di Grazia enjoys concocting recipes in her East Cliff kitchen. Her chocolate mousse with cheesecake on the bottom is for "people who can't decide."

Karol has watched the cottage entrepreneur business boom in Santa Cruz and says, "It's really amazing. More and more people are getting into this, and a lot of people are going into the gourmet line. Especially with chocolate." Her cakes

"I don't like working for someone else — there's more motivation and self esteem when I'm on my own. There's a lot of potential, but you've got to have money to make money."

"It is a lot of work," she says. "You've got to pound the pavement every day." She drives from Watsonville to Los Gatos in her BMW. One Tuesday morning she delivered 20 cakes to 15 businesses.

"I'm luck to make enough to pay my bills — it cost a lot to set up my kitchen. But I like it a lot. It is easy to come and work. But you won't get rich because it's hard to put a price on time. If you figure your time at minimum wage, and don't charge for delivery, a cake would cost \$35." And no one, she notes, could afford that.