

Oakland Press Article Independence woman gives granola a gourmet touch

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Independence woman gives granola a gourmet touch **WITH VIDEO**



The Oakland Press/TIM THOMPSON

Michaelene Hearn shows some of her Michaelene's Gourmet Granola at her Independence Township home. Last year, the company shipped more than 1,500 pounds of granola.

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Michaelene Hearn was just trying to provide healthy breakfasts for her family.

Twenty-eight years later, she has a thriving business selling granola that's been enjoyed around the world, including by the late Pope John Paul II.

ADVERTISING

Michaelene's Gourmet Granola, based in Independence Township, started solely as an effort to provide healthy food for her family of four girls.

"I found a recipe for Quaker Oats granola," she said. "It was good, but then I started changing it, a little bit here and a little bit there."

She always had a love of cooking but never really thought about it as an occupation. In fact, she became a teacher of the Lamaze method of natural childbirth.

In addition to information about labor and delivery, Hearn urged her Lamaze students to take care of their own bodies and those of her children by eating right. She mentioned her homemade granola and her students urged her to bring some in. She did and her students raved about it.

"I would give out my recipe, but they'd come back and say, 'I made it, but it came out different,' " Hearn said. "So I started making it for them."

She also shared her granola with members of the food co-op she belonged to at the time. Their enjoyment made her consider going into business for herself. That way, she could stay home with her daughters but still add a little to the family budget.

Her sister was a sales representative who frequently visited health food stores and helped spread the word about the granola.

From there, the business grew by word of mouth. Hearn wanted to keep her business small, and so she did not approach big stores such as Meijer or Wal-Mart.

In the early 1990s, then-Michigan Gov. James Blanchard had an incentive program for Michigan food producers to attend the International Fancy Food Show in New York.

Hearn and her husband Larry attended, and they "got a lot of orders" for their product.

The company soon outgrew their rented space in Clarkston's Village Bake Shop, where Hearn made the granola after business hours.

Today, Michaelene's Gourmet Granola is available in 11 states at upscale grocery stores and TWA airlines.

The TWA connection was how Michaelene's Gourmet Granola got to the late Pope. The airline handled the pontiff's 1995 flight to New York and Baltimore. A TWA representative had tasted the granola previously and recommended it to be served to the Pope on his trip back to Rome. His favorite was the Apple-Raisin Granola with cream.

There are 21 flavors of granola and two versions of granola cookies. There are two gluten-free varieties available.

The products have been endorsed by the American Diabetes Association. Hearn said her products have been served at spas and have been taken along on major mountain-climbing expeditions.

People certainly seem to want to eat Hearn's products -- the company shipped between 1,500 and 2,000 pounds of granola last year.

"People ask us, 'Don't you aspire to be something bigger?' " Hearn said. "No I don't. We just plan to continue loving what we do. We've worked carefully to be the best granola available."

FYI

In Oakland County, Michaelene's Gourmet Granola is sold at: Hiller's Markets in Commerce, Walled Lake, West Bloomfield and Northville Township; Plum Markets in Bloomfield Township and West Bloomfield; Westborn Markets in Berkley; Whole Foods in West Bloomfield and Rochester; Papa Joe's Grocery in Birmingham, Rochester Hills; Market Square in Birmingham, West Bloomfield; Market Fresh in Beverly Hills; Long Lake Market in Bloomfield Hills; Nino Salvaggio's Market in Troy; Holiday Market in Royal Oak; NutriFoods in Royal Oak; Hollywood Markets in Troy and Royal Oak; Western Market in Ferndale; Organic Food & Vitamin Center in Ferndale; Market Basket in Franklin; St. Joseph Mercy Oakland in Pontiac; Rudy's Market in Clarkston; Essence on Main in Clarkston; White Lake Country Market in White Lake; Harvest Time in Oxford; Great Lakes Marketplace in Holly. It can be shipped fresh anywhere in the world from the website www.gourmetgranola.com.