

Mompreneurs

A Sweet Feat

From banker to baker, mom's sweet tooth leads to cupcake empire

-Mary Beth Sammons



When Rachel Thebault enters a room, heads turn to gaze at the 32-year-old who is fast gaining a reputation as the sweetest mom in NYC. On a recent Sunday night, she was having dinner in a small neighborhood cafe with her husband and their 3-year-old daughter, Marin, when an 8-year-old boy came running over to her table, gushing, "I love Tribeca Treats!" The boy's father quickly showed up at his side, explaining, "You're kind of a celebrity in our household."

"That was really flattering and cute," said the former investment banker turned baker. Dubbed "the cupcake lady" of the neighborhood, Thebault these days makes her living as the head confectioner and owner of **Tribeca Treats** (www.tribecatreats.com).

Strategically situated in downtown Manhattan, just six blocks from Thebault's home, Marin's preschool and the pediatrician's office, Tribeca Treats is a specialty bakery offering upscale comfort desserts - from decadent cupcakes to truffles and chocolate bonbons.

Hands down, the cupcake reigns supreme, in flavors including: Sweet & Salty (chocolate cake with caramel icing, topped with chocolate covered pretzels), Black Velvet, Cinnamon, S'Mores Cake, Fluffer Nutter and Cookies & Cream.

What inspired you to launch your business?

I always had a passion for baking and an entrepreneurial drive, but I spent seven years as an investment banker before I decided to put the two together as a career. Ultimately, I made the decision to change careers based on what I saw as a better work/life balance down the road. I have been cooking and baking for as long as I can remember and love cooking for friends.



How did you get started?

I would make chocolate truffles for dinner parties for friends, and soon people were asking me to make them for parties and weddings. After I made the decision to start a custom dessert business, I enrolled in culinary school to obtain degrees in both pastry arts and culinary management.

What has been your toughest challenge in balancing being a mom and entrepreneur - a mompreneur?

It's also important to budget for the amount of money you will need to spend on child care. If you have children who are not in school yet, it's unrealistic to believe you can successfully start a business without some help in caring for them.

Gaining consumer/customer confidence is a lofty challenge. How did you market your business?

The power of word-of-mouth recommendations has been the most influential factor to our growth so far. People come in all the time and say, "Oh, someone in my office was raving about this place." We even had a woman last week who said, "I came all the way down here from the Upper East Side, because the people behind me at the ballet had such great things to say about you." Also, for every birthday cake we do, another five people at the party call us to order cakes, so the growth can be exponential.

How long did it take before you started to make a profit?

We are not profitable yet, but I am hoping to be by the end of the year [almost two years after opening].

Describe your 'flex' plan: how you balance sick kids, child-care issues and other surprises that can disrupt the workday.

My daughter spends a lot of time at the bakery and has favorite activities or

games to keep her occupied (most of the time). If my daughter is home sick, I can find productive things to do for work while I take care of her.

What's the most exciting event you've catered?

Most exciting was probably a multitier cake we did for a Lacoste Fashion Week party. Although it was actually probably more stressful than exciting, because we had less than 24 hours' notice, but it was fun to see that we could work well under pressure and get it done.

Has this caused you to redefine "having it all"?

I have a hard time with the phrase "having it all," because with every choice you make, there is something left not chosen - something sacrificed. But that said, I do feel that I have built a very happy, satisfying life for myself, and that is what's important to me. There is an American Express ad in which Ellen DeGeneres filled out a questionnaire, and in the blank "My Life Is," she answered, "Perfect. Even when it's not." I find that so inspirational, especially on the bad days, so I guess when you know your life is perfect even when it's not, that's having it all.

Quick questions:

Favorite dessert: Anything with peanut butter and banana.

Cupcake consumption: Probably about once a day. You know, for quality-control reasons.

Perfect vacation: African safari by way of Paris.

Favorite dining experience: Eating under the stars at the French Laundry.

Always makes me smile: My daughter's giggle.

Addictions: Fantasy Football, Project Runway.

Favorite night in: Poker night with friends.

Favorite night out: Karaoke.

Education: Colgate University, Institute of Culinary Education.

Three things in my pocketbook: iPhone, Lancome Juicy Tubes lip gloss and Jonathan Adler pocket-sized notebook for spur-of-the-moment ideas.