

Bread baking business allows LuAnn Sheeder to make money while staying home with preschoolers

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

MANHEIM — Like many mothers LuAnn Sheeder wanted to combine earning an income with caring for her three young children at home. She found that opportunity by baking and selling delicious homemade bread.

LuAnn says, "It was an answer to my prayers. I had been praying to find a way to earn money at home." She had tried to write and sell children's books, and had even sold some greeting card verses, but income from that source is far from certain.

It was her husband, Barry, who suggested the idea, and when she resisted, he kept after her.

She says, "My husband kind of pushed me. I just couldn't visualize doing it. I didn't know that much about it and I didn't bake for my family. It didn't seem like a good idea to me, but the more I fought it, the more it seemed to be the right thing."

Barry actually got out the equipment and got her started, and LuAnn says, "Once he got me doing it, I started experimenting."

The experiments paid off, because now she makes eight batches of bread every Friday, which is about 50 loaves of varying sizes. Sometimes there is none left for the family, and occasionally LuAnn finds herself getting up Saturday morning and baking bread—but in smaller quantities. She and her husband have three children: Joanna, five; Jeremiah, four; and Jonathan, two.

The business began with her husband taking orders from co-workers. Then she started selling off the front porch of their home, conveniently located along busy Route 72 north of Manheim.

Totally supportive, her husband made her a sign, and she says in a surprised tone, "People just started stopping."

She began her business in May, and over the summer offered bread on Wednesdays and Fridays. Since school has started and tourists are no longer so plentiful, she has dropped the Wednesday baking and limits it to Friday.

Fridays are proving to be good, because traffic increases with the Manheim Auto Auction.

LuAnn says, "Bread is a good item, because people like it and they don't take the time to make it. I couldn't stop doing it. It seems to be God's answer for now." She added that she decided she would charge what was necessary, and so far, says, "People don't seem to mind paying."

Now she says, "I have to admit that I do like it." She has worked out her own recipe by experimenting, and now doesn't need to consult it when mixing the batter. She also doesn't time the rising process, depending instead upon her experience and the look and feel of the dough. She notes, "I'd go crazy if I had to time it."

LuAnn makes three sizes of bread, admitting, "It would be easier to make one size, but people who live alone really like the small loaf."

To make each size uniform, LuAnn weighs each portion of dough. "It wouldn't be fair to guess about the size," she says matter-of-factly.

She offers white, cinnamon raisin and whole wheat bread, but adds that she will make bread for special diets upon request. She currently makes a bread that is salt and sugar free for someone who must have that diet. She has had a few requests for rye bread, and has tried some recipes. But so far she has not been pleased with the results and doesn't offer it. She said she tries new breads if she finds recipes that are appealing, but prefers to stick to the three she is currently making.

LuAnn uses a recipe which is a mixture of high gluten and unbleached flours. High gluten flour, which is used primarily for pizza dough, makes a crisper crust than bread purchased in a store. One caution, however, is that if you use too much high gluten flour, the crust becomes impossible to cut. LuAnn purchases all her supplies in bulk for economy.

She is hoping to write a booklet on bread baking tips to pass along some of the things she has learned as she bakes. She credits Tom Flory of Flory's Mill with giving her needed advice as she started her business.

She did not have a big investment in equipment, needing just a few larger stainless steel bowls, and extra bread pans in addition to the ingredients.

LuAnn mixes all her ingredients by hand and has considered purchasing a large commercial mixer, but thinks she can't afford the investment until the business is a little more established. She says, "I still feel it is on a trial basis."

To make bread in the quantities she does, LuAnn gets up as early as 2 a.m. She mixes up the first four batches, then begins working with them as they rise. One by one she punches down the dough and forms it into loaves, allowing them to rise once again before baking. She uses dry yeast, mixing it directly with the flour. In the summer, the high humidity helps with rising times, but even as cooler weather approaches LuAnn says she has no problems with the dough rising. She points out that it is important not to have the dough rise too fast, or the finished product will be full of air bubbles.

LuAnn rolls the individual portions out on her counter, then rolls them to form a loaf, carefully pinching the loaf to keep it from having air spaces when it is finished. She greases the top of each loaf and then covers it with plastic wrap, which she prefers to a cloth because the dough never sticks to it. When it has risen properly, it is baked in her regular oven.



LuAnn punches down this batch of bread dough before doing the final kneading.

Since she has large quantities of bread cooling at once, her husband designed a way for her to use a drying rack by laying oven racks over wooden rods. This allows free circulation of air. As the loaves cool completely, LuAnn bags them in clear plastic, adding her name to each bag so people know where to find her if they want to order more bread.

Her kitchen and dining room are turned into a work space, and nothing much goes on there except bread baking. The two preschoolers check on progress from time to time.

Several months after she began selling bread, LuAnn got a request for shoo fly pie. Although she could not make the pies, a neighbor, Judy

Lentz felt she could, and shoo fly pies quickly were added to the business. Now that fall is here, apple and pumpkin pies have been added.

Judy says, "I like making pies. It works out really well. I can have a small business without leaving home." She and her husband, John, have four children: Julianne, seven; Jennifer, six; John, four; and Jim, two.

Judy admits that her part of the business is easier than LuAnn's because she can do hers the night before. She said she would rather stay up late at night then get up early as would be necessary to have pies there in the morning.

Judy's husband tells her she's

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Shoo-fly pie is the most popular pie Judy Lentz makes to sell, although she is also making pumpkin and apple now that fall has arrived.



Judy Lentz, left, and LuAnn Sheeder set up the table from which they sell freshly-made bread and pies. The two are collaborating on a business which allows them to be home with their small children while earning an income.



LuAnn works in her kitchen rolling out one of the more than 50 loaves of homemade bread she makes each Friday.

Homestead Notes