

Marge Gaffron Is Up And Baking By 5:30 a.m.

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— It all started ten years ago when several of Marge Gaffron's neighbors, impressed with the quality of the bread she was baking for her family, made this request: "If you're going to be baking, why don't you do five loaves for us?"

Well, that's not really when it all started. To be honest, it all began when, at the age of three, Marge was taught the fine art of baking by her aunt.

"I had my own little rolling pin, pie tin, mixer and oven," she reminisces.

Well, the "it" that all began with the toddler who loved to bake is Gaffron's Sunrise Bakery, a very successful home-based business that dwells within Marge's kitchen in the tiny town of Woodward.

Marge still bakes for those neighbors, but she does much more, as she admits, "I sometimes feel like I'm feeding half of Centre County."

That statement might not be much of an exaggeration.

Six years ago Gaffron decided to direct market her bread at a farmers' market in Bellefonte, the county seat. The market was Wednesday morning, and vendors vied for spaces on a first-come, first-claim basis. Marge bundled up her pajama-clad youngsters and arrived in Bellefonte at 4 a.m. to secure a shady spot. Gaffron fared well at the Bellefonte market, but Marge could not sell that-day fresh goods because it was an early morning market.

In 1985 she began attending a Tuesday market at Boalsburg and a Friday market at State College. Both markets run June through October.

A few years back, two of Gaffron's savvy market customers saw to it that she was provided with an opportunity to wholesale her goods.

These customers missed Sunrise Bakery bread during the winter months, but they were reluctant to travel the 25 miles to Woodward to make their purchases. Instead, they marketed Marge's bread to the manager of a specialty foods store in State College. Gaffron's Sunrise products are now on the shelves of five stores in Centre County.

If you've ever wondered about a home-based business, read on! Here's a list of the delectable delights that each week makes its way from Gaffron's kitchen to her customers' tables:

- 25 loaves of white bread
- 40 loaves of whole wheat bread
- 25 loaves of herb bread
- 40 loaves of three-seed bread
- 50 loaves of three-braid bread
- 30 loaves of St. John's unleavened bread
- 20 loaves of whole wheat, oat bread
- 20 loaves of whole wheat, herb bread
- 20 loaves of whole wheat, raisin bread
- 10 loaves of white raisin bread
- 20 loaves of dill bread
- 40 packages of whole wheat English muffins
- 20 packages of white English muffins
- 70 packages of sticky buns
- 20 packages of sandwich rolls
- 15 packages of chocolate chip cookies
- 15 packages of peanut butter cookies
- 15 packages of rice krispie treats
- 40 dozen tassies (tiny pecan pies)

This list means that Gaffron processes 200 to 250 pounds of flour per week during the market season. The Sunrise Bakery kitchen does boast two pieces of equipment that probably are not found in your kitchen: a commercial oven and a commercial mixer. The other items that give away the fact that the kitchen houses a bakery are the rolling, flour-filled garbage cans and the bread racks. Otherwise, Marge's kitchen is your standard, farmhouse-heart of the home.

Now, let's take a look at a typical Gaffron Bakery market-season week. Monday is a baking day for Tuesday's market. Gaffron begins the day by mixing stickie buns at 5:30 a.m. She then mixes bread and baking tassies. "Between bread and tassies," as she puts it, she mixes cookie and tassie dough for the remainder of the week.

Tuesday means 5:30 stickie mixing again, which enables Marge to take still-warm buns to her retail outlets and the Tuesday market. Occasionally, she will also bake cookies on Tuesday morning. Then, it's off to the



Marge Gaffron with just one of the hundreds of trays of bread she's produced over the years.

Boalsburg market which opens at noon.

Wednesday is Marge's middle of the week day off. She takes inventory of her ingredients, gives her kitchen a thorough cleaning, and does some late-evening tassie shaping. A day off, really?

The big baking day of the week is Thursday. During market season Marge puts in 18 hours in her kitchen. She bakes for the Friday, State College market and for all five retail outlets.

On Friday morning Gaffron shapes and bakes her St. John's bread which has been resting all night. She also does stickies, again, sandwich rolls too. All this, and she makes it to market by 10:30.

If this rigorous schedule sounds like a lot of work, it should, because it is! "I get very tired," admits Marge. "I try to do more than I should do in one day. The new equipment (stove and mixer)

have taken some of the physical hardness out of it-- I no longer knead by hand."

Never mind the hard work, an interview with Marge Gaffron soon proves to the listener that this woman loves her baking. She speaks of each type of bread almost as affectionately as she does her three children, Rebecca, Abigail, and Tobey. "I think my bread is good, I think it tastes good," she says firmly.

There are many other advantages to this home-based business, according to Gaffron. Independence ranks high on her list, "...though sometimes that's almost a drawback because I have to make decisions," she adds.

There is the fact that she's producing a tangible commodity. "I have something to show for my time; it's instant gratification. I can look at it, count it, put my hands on it."

And, then, there are the customers. The typical Gaffron Sunrise Bakery buyer is a mother of three or four who picks up several loaves of bread, a couple packages of stickies, some sandwich rolls, and a few English muffins, in other words; baked goods for the entire week. "I feel as though I'm helping people have something good in their lives: something useful," she says thoughtfully.

Most importantly, however, is the way that the business allows her family to become involved. "Some days I can't do things that

the kids would like me to, and they can't have a pet in the house; but, I can quit while I'm baking. I may have flour on my hands, but I'm here."

Rebecca, Marge's 18-year-old daughter, has taken a very active part in the bakery business. "We've been doing this together since she was twelve," Marge explains. "Each year she's learned to do a little more. Now she could really handle it on her own."

If there is a real "down side" to the story of Gaffron's Sunrise Bakery, it may be that the business is at a crossroads. "I'm really faced now with whether I'm going to have help and expand or just stay put, and I don't know what I'm going to do," Marge admitted. She recently turned down a restaurant order for 200 loaves of bread per week. "I've been trying to make growth a slow process," explains Gaffron. "I think there's a middle ground where you don't make any money."

Maybe the fact that the bakery is at a crossroads is anything but the "down side." "It's going to be hard for me to make a decision not to grow," grins Marge. "As a matter of fact, I probably won't make that decision. It's not in my nature not to grow."

Marge Gaffron doesn't need to tell anyone that. Spend an evening with the proprietress of Gaffron's Sunrise Bakery, and you'll know only one way she'd choose to go, and that is bigger.



Marge browns her English muffins on a skillet, turning each one individually.

Homestead Notes