

Woman Develops Chocolates With Pizazz

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

MARIETTA (Lancaster Co.)—

While five pounds of chocolate warms, Lois Ann Littlehale confesses, "I'm not a big chocolate lover, but when I eat it, I want it to be good."

"Good" doesn't sufficiently describe Lois Ann's raspberry truffles and chocolates that melt in your mouth.

Not satisfied with ordinary factory-made chocolates, Lois Ann spent several years researching and experimenting with fine chocolates before she launched her own business, Old Colebrook Sweets and Treats.

"Chocolates that taste as good as this are hard to find," she said as she arranged an assortment of the homemade chocolates in a box.

Although the trend has been toward cutting fat in diets, Lois Ann is convinced that there will always be a market for fine chocolates.

"People don't want to eat empty calories. They are becoming more select about what they eat. A small piece of my chocolate is more satisfying than eating a whole candy bar," she said.

She uses the finest combination of cocoa chocolate that she buys from a chocolate factory and then tempers.

Tempering chocolate is achieved by heating and cooling chocolate to specific temperatures, causing cocoa butter crystal formation so the the chocolate coating will stay firm and glossy without wax or refrigeration of the coated candy.

Instead of tempering chocolate, which is time consuming, many cooks add shortening or paraffin (which is not approved by the USDA for human consumption).

But, adding shortening or wax to chocolate results in a waxy taste in the mouth. You can taste the difference. If you take a bite from candies made with these different methods, you will find the chocolate made by tempering melts in your mouth with no waxy aftertaste.

After studying recipes, Lois Ann experimented with different techniques such as using warming trays and heating pads, but she took the plunge and invested in a \$700 machine to melt chocolate. While that may seem like a lot of money, Lois Ann believes it is well



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worth it. The machine keeps the chocolate at the same temperature all day.

After experimenting with many recipes, Lois Ann started developing her own. "I like to play with recipes. I'm never satisfied, but always like to play a bit more," she said.

Some of her specialties include raspberry truffles made with dark chocolate and sprinkled with gold dust, chocolates in a cream base or with nuts, or with chocolate centers. Roachers, which are slivered almonds, toasted coconut, and a blend of chocolate, provide another tasty option for chocolate lovers.

"Certain coatings complement each other. Others don't do anything for it," Lois Ann said of her quest to develop the perfect combinations.

Although Lois Ann was finicky about taste, she also didn't want to settle for ordinary-looking chocolates. She wanted something with pizzazz.

That's how she came up with truffles embossed in gold. One of her items is chocolate liquor cups, dusted inside with edible gold dust that rises to the top when liquid is poured into them. Another unique idea is her white chocolate cups made to fill with mousse or some other special filling, the dessert turns an ordinary dessert into a gourmet one.

Since Lois Ann drives a Corvette, she was thrilled to have a mold for a 1963 split window Corvette, which she makes in white or dark chocolate and is considering filling with chocolate hearts.

Before Lois Ann started offering her chocolates for sale, she entered her chocolates in fairs to see how they would do among competition. All her entries took first-place ribbons and at one fair, her truffles took best of show out of 240 entries.

After Lois Ann had her candy recipes perfected, the next problem was to find suitable packaging. Lois Ann considers herself lucky by finding a candy supplier who was going out of business. She purchased candy boxes and gossamer paper to add an elegant touch.

Lois Ann said that her perfectionistic tendencies were absorbed from watching her parents, who, she said, were excellent cooks but never wanted to be bothered with having kids help in the kitchen. She spent endless hours watching her parents make ethnic Slovak dishes such as perogies — a day-long chore.

When Lois Ann was on her own, cooking became her forte.

"If the family eats the stuff, I know it's good," she said of her husband Leon and four adult children.

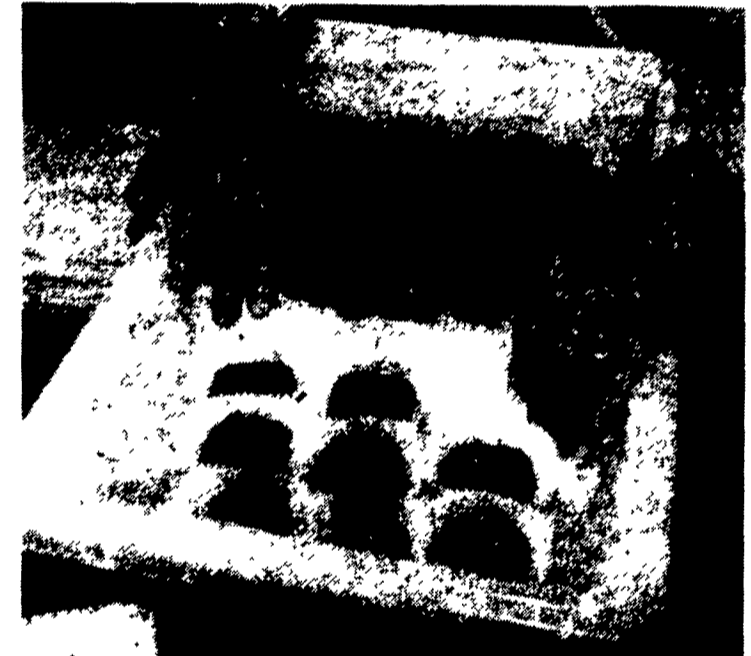
Lois Ann's interest in selling chocolates was piqued when she and a friend set up a stand to sell crafts at a show with other craftsman. All day long, the stand that was selling homemade candies was busy.

"People can't eat wreaths but they go nuts with chocolate," Lois Ann remarked to her friends.

Now that Lois Ann knows how



Lois Ann Littlehale experimented with making chocolates to discover the best method and tastes.



"I like to play with recipes. I'm never satisfied," Lois Ann said of her quest to come up with new ideas for truffle fillings.

to make good chocolates, she isn't taking them to craft shows.

"It's too 'iffy' to demonstrate at craft shows. If it's high humidity, chocolate doesn't work well. To make high quality chocolates, temperatures cannot be fluctuating. I'd rather retail," Lois Ann said.

Lois Ann's chocolates have the stamp of approval from the Pa. Dept. of Ag. All ingredients have been analyzed and approved. In addition, Lois Ann has taken out an insurance policy as protection from liability.

"I need to pay the same rate as the big chocolate companies," she said.

Although Lois Ann has no experience in marketing, she said, contacting potential buyers such as bed and breakfasts and upscale

restaurants doesn't faze her.

"I am confident that I have a good product," she said.

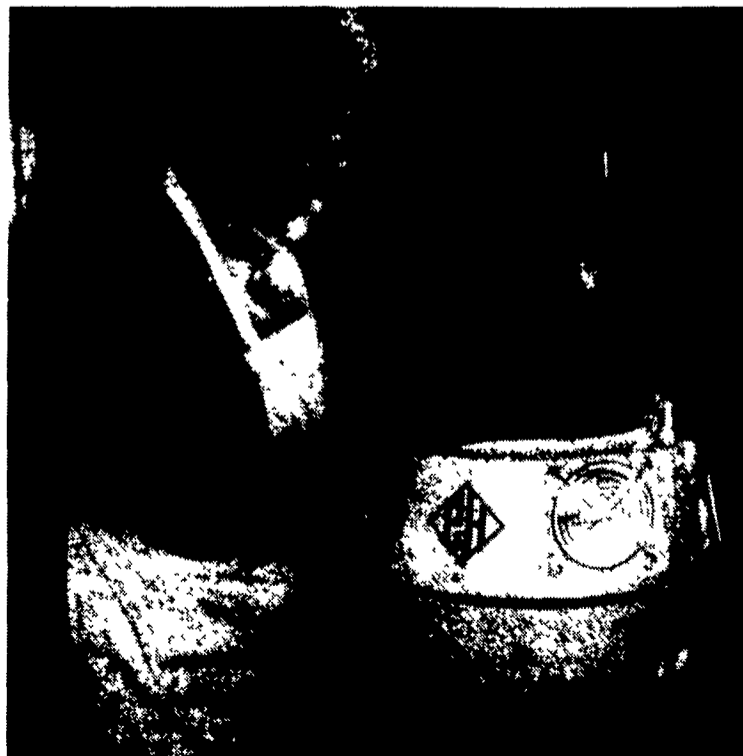
The costs for liability, licensing, and marketing does not deter Lois Ann's enthusiasm for operating an in-home business.

"I know that someday this will take off," she said.

Her dream is to develop a self-supporting business, but even more than that she wants to produce quality chocolates that keep people happy.

"I know my chocolates are the best. People just need to taste them," she said.

To order homemade chocolates, write or phone Old Colebrook Sweets and Treats, 191 Old Colebrook Rd., Marietta, PA 17547. Phone (717) 426-2848.



Lois Ann is not deterred by the investment in a \$700 chocolate warmer, the inspection procedures by the Pennsylvania Dept. of Agriculture, and the marketing required to start up a home-based business. "I know that someday this will take off. My chocolates are the best," she said.

Keep The Farm In The Family

HONESDALE (Wayne Co.)— Are you a farm operator who wants to be sure your farm would continue to operate if something happened to you? Do you want to transfer the farm to your children? Will your family have enough money to keep the farm going? Will you have enough money to live on the farm to retire? Have you talked with other family

members?
To get answers to questions like these, plan to attend "Keeping the Farm in the Family," on Tuesday, November 26, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Wayne County Extension Office, Court House, Honesdale. Reservations are required for this estate planning workshop. Call (717) 253-5970 ext. 239.