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business

Cupcake bakery's success comes in small packages

Interview | Porche Lovely, 34, owner of Lovely Confections, a cupcake shop at East Colfax Avenue and Steele Street

By The Denver Post

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Porche Lovely was nudged into the cupcake business after being laid off from Sun Microsystems in 2004. Before opening her own bakery, though, she attended pastry school at Johnson & Wales University, worked on a business plan and studied the industry. (John Prieto, The Denver Post)

Q: Cupcakes have become very popular over the last few years; is this something you always wanted to do?

A: I was a huge "Sex and the City" fan when it was on HBO, so I've been aware of cupcake bakeries for a while.

I've always loved food and baking. Going into the food business was something I always wanted to do. I started researching cupcakes during pastry school and I just fell in love with pictures of rows and rows of cupcakes. Each one was so perfect and sweet (literally and figuratively). Cupcakes just seemed like it would be a great business to be in.

Q: Did you study pastry initially in college? What

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led you to this field?

A: I graduated from the University of Colorado with a B.A. in history in 1997. After I was laid off from my corporate job at Sun Microsystems in 2004, I took it as an opportunity to go to pastry school at Johnson & Wales University. It was an excellent place to develop the skills I'd learned as an amateur and really learn the best way to bake professionally.

Q: What is the business of cupcakes? How did you design your business plan?

A: I started writing my business plan in pastry school. One of the courses in the curriculum required us to plan our own business. It started me thinking about what it would take to own a bakery. All of this was pretty idealistic though, as I'd never worked in a professional kitchen.

After graduation, I worked in professional kitchens and learned what I would need to change my business plan. It also really helped me to refine my idea, which led to cupcakes.

In the spring of 2007 I started working on my business plan again and received a lot of help from SCORE (a nonprofit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs). My SCORE adviser helped me refine my business plan to the point that I received different funding options.

Another important thing that I did was to research cupcake bakeries all across the United States. Anytime I took a trip, I'd visit every cupcake bakery I could find. One trip I designed

included visiting 12 different cupcake bakeries in New York City, including Magnolia Bakery (the cupcake shop made famous by "Sex and the City").

I learned a lot about how other bakeries work, which was very informative. But it also reinforced my ideas about how my cupcake bakery was going to be unique and follow my ideals and philosophies.

Q: What is the best thing about the cupcake business?

A: From the business side, it is great to be able to focus on one product because it limits the inventory, ordering, packaging, production, advertising, marketing, etc. that goes into running a business.

I previously worked in a full-service bakery and realized how complex it is. As it is, I have to keep a lot of balls in the air to keep the business going, and as a first-time entrepreneur being able to focus is great. From the baking side, cupcakes are versatile so we can be creative with their flavors and decoration.

From a personal side, it is awesome and rewarding to be part of cupcakes in Denver. Denverites are really getting into cupcakes, and it is so fun. We get to be a part of celebrations, parties and everyday events that are part of our customers' lives. It's really quite a treat to make someone's day.

Q: What is your favorite cupcake flavor? And

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what are some of the wildest creations you've made?

A: My favorite are our chocolate cake with chocolate buttercream and carrot cake with cream cheese icing.

We've had a pumpkin cupcake on the menu for the past couple of weeks and it's pretty darn tasty too. We did a S'mores cupcake with chocolate cake, chocolate ganache, graham cracker, vanilla buttercream and a toasted homemade marshmallow. It was almost 5 inches tall!

We also made a baklava cupcake, which was pretty unusual. One of our favorite things to do is to take an item that isn't a typical cupcake flavor and turn it into one, like the baklava cupcake.

Edited for length and clarity by staff writer Elizabeth Aguilera

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