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Lifestyles

Mt. Kisco Bakery Inspires More Than Appetites

DANNY LOPRIORE

Local business trains jobless, supports charities

Man does not live by bread alone.

There are pastries, cookies, cakes, pies and, in the case of Connie's Bakery & General Store, a little ingredient called love.

Nestled in the busy Mount Kisco downtown shopping district between the banks, restaurants and other larger retail stores on South Moger Avenue, Connie's has provided the local community with an appetizing combination of bakery goods since opening its doors in 2005. It also sells handmade crafts, gifts and the vision of charity in the kitchen.

Stepping through the front door of the small "everything is baked on site" space, a visitor immediately discovers that the bottom line at Connie's is quality. The handiwork of artists, craftsmen and women and other creators of fine work fills the shelves and display tables and the atmosphere quickly transports one to Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard or some other summer spot where shopping in small shops is part of the lure.

"Connie" is Constance Milstein, an attorney and business executive in New York City's real estate and property development industry whose devotion to



charitable causes inspired the Mount Kisco business. She chose the location for her community-based philanthropic project after learning that the affluent Westchester County area was home to thousands in need of jobs and many who were in poverty.

"Connie's goal was to establish a business where net profits would go to charity and at the same time those who wanted to pursue a career would have an opportunity," said Connie's Chief Operating Officer Deena Plotka, who gushes with pride when describing the founder and the sweet shop.

"Connie's is a place you have to visit. It's not just the great desserts and gifts or the fact the business is dedicated to helping people, which is wonderful, but there's (an) atmosphere of hope you can sense when you see the chef work with his staff." There are the tempting aromas of freshly baked tarts, cookies, cakes and other delights made more appealing when you can see each treat being assembled and baked right before your eyes. Connie's baked goods are made by hand from scratch with fresh ingredients, including seasonal fruits, which are grown locally.

Executive Pastry Chef Simeon Manber, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, not only provides the luscious stock of goodies, but trains apprentice bakers as part of Connie's association with JobSTAR, which offers education and training in a joint project with Westchester Community College and the Westchester Department of Social Services.

"I couldn't ask for a better environment to share my experience," said Manber, a Poughkeepsie native and formerly a chef for Mario Batali's restaurant Babbo in Manhattan. "We have had a great time teaching the apprentices and watching as they begin their careers. And the bakery produces the best product with the best in-



gredients. Whenever possible we use local produce which adds a special touch. Knowing that all the profits go to help people really motivates us that much more.”

The general store offers hand-made jewelry, toys, bookmarks, body lotions, candles, candies and other delightful treasures that are often included in gift baskets. There are even Tooth Fairy kits to help parents make the loss of their children’s teeth a memorable event. Several of the artisans featured on Connie’s shelves also donate a percentage of their profits to charity.

Connie’s has a growing clientele of on-line shoppers and corporate accounts

that have helped grow the business, but Connie’s family—Plotka, Manber, staffer Liane Paap and the apprentice bakery crew—invite repeat and potential customers to “take the walk into town” for a personal visit to the shop. We ship custom gift baskets and other things all over the United States and even to Europe, but Connie’s (is) one of those special places where when you visit you can just sense the love in each product,” Plotka said. “Connie Milstein’s vision is an example

of what we can do when we share.”

As for Milstein, who has developed a long and impressive philanthropic legacy of her own with memberships on boards for Refugees International, New York City Parks Foundation, founder of both Medical Missions for Children and Global Classrooms project of the United Nations and The American Hospital of Paris among others, her motivation is as simple and sweet as her Mount Kisco bakery.

“I’ve been blessed in my life,” said Milstein who grew up in Westchester and now resides in New York City and Connecticut. “For me to be happy, I need to share with other people.”

Connie’s Bakery & General Store is located at 41 South Moger Avenue (off street down a walkway). Store hours are Monday through Friday 10-6 and Saturday 10-5. For more information or to order the store’s products, log on to www.connies.org

