



Sweet Charity

Connie Milstein Finds a delectable way to do good

MARY SHUSTACK

CONNIE'S BAKERY & GENERAL STORE

is a hidden treasure, not only where it lies but what lies within.

Philanthropist Connie Milstein created the warm and cozy space in 2005 along one of Mount Kisco's downtown walkways.

Complete with wood floors and an array of decorative baskets, the store not only offers a wealth of fresh baked goods, homemade gourmet treats and a well-curated selection of hand-crafted gifts for all ages, but also trains those who have faced barriers to sustainable employment.

Stop by this month and pick up a tin of cookies or a bath of cupcakes, a lattice-topped fruit pie or perhaps even the classic *bûche de Noël*. And while you're having your goodies wrapped, browse among the scarves and soaps, candles and ornaments, toys and pet items, jewelry and kitchen wares.

It's hard not to find something to bring home.

And the icing on the signature cupcake? Every sale helps the efforts since the profits – 100 percent of them – are donated.

"You can be extra naughty



Connie Milstein with executive pastry chef Simeon Manber. She founded Connie's Bakery & General Store in 2005.

here, because the profits are going to charity," says Simeon Manber, the executive pastry chef, reeling off a list of specialties ranging from cupcakes frosted with authentic Italian buttercream to a pear-cranberry-ginger pie. "Somebody once said 'Calories don't count, because everything is going to charity.'"

We like the sound of that.

The globetrotting Milstein, an attorney, entrepreneur, senior business executive and countess (she's the Countess de La Haye Saint Hilaire), was not on hand when WAG paid a recent visit – "chief cupcake" Deena Plotka gave us a tour – but Milstein did indeed take a few moments to fill us in on both the venture's history and the sweet treats in store for this holiday season.

FOR SOMEONE UNFAMILIAR WITH CONNIE'S BAKERY, HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN ITS ESSENCE?

"I like to think of Connie's Bakery & General Store as a grandma's kitchen – a place that is warm and cozy with yummy treats, but more important, a place that nourishes the soul of a family, offering support and guidance to everyone who is part of the family.

"Our family is the community, and I am so proud of the jobs we create, our training program for those who face barriers to sustainable employment and the incredible charities we support... organizations like the Family Resource Center of Peekskill, which put new windows in some of its homes, or the Westchester Children's Museum, which expanded its Museum Without Walls campaign."

HAS THE EFFORT FOLLOWED THE PATH YOU HOPED?

"I am thrilled with our success and look forward to much more in the coming years. When I started Connie's Bakery, I wanted to build a socially responsible company, and I had three goals: I wanted to create jobs to help boost the economy; I wanted to help people who struggled finding sustainable employment; and I wanted to help people who helped the community.

"It's seven years later, and the truth is I would consider Connie's Bakery a success if we helped just one person. But the fact that we have helped over 30 non-profits makes me want to keep going!"

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARD PART ABOUT IT?

"The rewards are endless. One of my favorite stories is about a young women who was one of the first graduates of our training program and is now back at



Connie's Bakery as the assistant pastry chef. She is just one of our success stories.

"And I love hearing from the people whose lives have been touched by Connie's Bakery. I recently received a letter from a child who had drawn a picture of his house with new windows, and that picture is a wonderful reminder of the difference we make."

WOULD YOU ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF PHILANTHROPY IN TODAY'S ECONOMY?

"It's unfortunate that the downturn in the economy has lessened what some can give. But philanthropy can come in all shapes and sizes.

The model for Connie's Bakery is based on our profits, which means the more we sell, the more we give back. So this holiday season we encourage people to buy holiday gifts from Connie's Bakery and with one gift, you will really be giving two gifts – first to the intended recipient and then again to one of our nonprofit charitable partners."

HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE BUSINESS – HECTIC, EXCITING?

"All of the above and more!" We have amazing and very loyal staffers who take great pride in their work. Their wonderful attitudes and great team effort help to keep the stress level low since it

does get hectic during the holidays.

“Our gift baskets, gift tins and hand-made gifts come with their personal touch and, of course, our message of giving back. One of the things that keeps us going are the calls and emails from gift recipients across the country thanking us and expressing their genuine gratitude about receiving a gift that gives back to others.”

ARE THERE ANY “MUST-HAVE” TREATS FOR THE SEASON – ANYTHING ESPECIALLY SWEET (OR PERHAPS “SINFUL”)?

“Our executive pastry chef Simeon Manber and his team make amazing holiday brownies, old fashioned cookies and biscotti that we pack in decorative tins for the holidays. Our

recently re-launched website (connies.org) showcases our selection of gift baskets that contain unique gifts and treats – no cookie cutter baskets at Connie’s Bakery!”

CONNIES BAKERY & GENERAL STORE IS AT 41 S. MOGER AVE. IN MOUNT KISCO. CALL (914)242-2014 OR VISIT CONNIES.ORG.