

WESTCHESTER COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

ALL ABOUT BUSINESS IN NEW YORK'S GOLDEN APPLE

New baked goods store gives all net profits to nonprofits

JOAN STABLEFORD

The new Connie's Bakery & General Store delights a patron's sweet tooth, while at the same time accomplishing a Ben & Jerry's type of socially responsible mission.

All of the store's net annual profits will be given to six selected charities in Westchester County and the lower Hudson Valley communities by Foundation Sweet Success, the nonprofit foundation set up to disperse the after-tax profits of the baked goods store.

The brainchild of this storefront bakery at 41 South Moger Ave. in the heart of downtown Mount Kisco is founder Connie Milstein, an attorney and realtor and developer in New York City. Named by Real Estate Weekly in 2004 as one of the top 50 women in real estate in the New York metropolitan area, Milstein is a principal of Ogden CAP Properties L.L.C., and a former co-chairman of Douglas Elliman, Inc., New York's largest residential real estate brokerage. Milstein has been a philanthropist and patron of the arts, sciences and education all of her adult life.



Left, executive pastry chef Simeon Manber (far right) examines the work of Owen Sterling and Janie Jackson. Above, Liane Paap helps Rachel Bender and her baby, Marley, make a selection from the baked goods.

"After seeing story after story in the news about the terrible state of the job market and cuts in government funding to programs that serve the most vulnerable, plus learning that over 200,000 people go to

bed hungry every night in Westchester, one of the wealthiest counties in the country, I decided I couldn't sit by on the sidelines any longer." Milstein said.

"There is a very thin line between

having a job one day and being out on the street the next, and I wanted to find a way to create jobs which would provide those who are at risk with skills they can use to help get and keep decent jobs. I've been very blessed in my life and in order to feel good, I need to share with others," she added.

Milstein has two objectives with this bakery — to give away 100 percent of its net profits to charities and to provide meaningful apprentice bakery training each year to four individuals, who have previously received public assistance through a cooperative program with JobSTAR.

Since 1990, JobSTAR has offered education and training to individuals who were receiving public assistance. JobSTAR is a joint project between Westchester Community College and the Westchester County Department of Social Services. The bakery apprentices are graduates of the 12-week food preparation/sanitation certification training course. While at Connie's, they are paid a living wage and receive health benefits.

"After a year's apprenticeship at the bakery, Connie's will assist them in finding higher-level jobs in the food services industry. Then, we will choose four more apprentices for training," Milstein said.

Every two months, a new charity is featured at the bakery. The charity is listed on the chalkboard behind the counter

and employees distribute their literature to interested customers in the hope that it will generate volunteers for the charity and direct donations to them. People who are interested in supporting the mission of Connie's Bakery & General Store, but who may not want desserts or gifts at the moment, can also make tax-deductible donations directly to the foundation.

"At the end of the year, the more the store sells and the more donations we receive, the more money we will have to distribute," Milstein said.

Milstein said her customers have recommended charities to her and even prior to the store's opening, she received lots of suggestions. In addition, since the store's opening in February, she has received 40 direct requests for support from nonprofit organizations. Every two months, she reviews the list of candidates and selects the next charitable partner.

To date, two charities, Food P.A.T.C.H., Westchester's largest food bank, and a new program called Top Chefs Soups, a project of Westhab, have been chosen. Top Chefs Soup is a project which employs homeless women in packaging incredible dried bean soups which have been developed by seven of the most respected chefs in Westchester County. A third charity is about to be selected for July.

All of the baked goods in the store — the cookies, cakes, pies and tarts — are made on the premises, just like your grandmother made, Milstein said. The most popular baked goods are the "Chocolate UFOs," a sandwich cookie with marshmallow cream in the middle. Whenever possible, Connie's tries to support local farmers and craftsmen throughout the Hudson Valley by purchasing ingredients from them. In addition to the baked goods, she also sells New York farms jams and jellies and retro fabric bags from New York artisans.

The creation of the pastries, cookies and cakes are under the close supervision and direction of executive pastry chef Simeon Manber, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and former sous chef for the trustees' dining room at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Prior to becoming a chef, Manber had previously worked with two nonprofit organizations that helped individuals with developmental disabilities and mental illness live independent lives.

Connie's Bakery & General Store is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. To order a special bakery item, call 242-2014. To make a direct donation to her foundation, go to her Web site at www.connnies.org.