

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE from Boats to Breakfast

Local granola maker
starts new business

BY ANDREW DOMINO



Most people who like to cook get a chance to experiment now and then — maybe they make dinner for their families a few times a week or host a party on Saturday night. Then there are people who turn their favorite foods into a money-making venture.

Barb Perkovic, 68, co-owns The Adventures of Barb & Tammy, where each week she helps mix up a batch of granola for sale at local farmers' markets. Her partner, Tammy Buffin, stirs together the dry ingredients, and Perkovic handles the liquids. They spend about four hours a week creating granola of nearly a dozen varieties, from cherry pecan to "peanut butter and jelly" to seasonal types like pumpkin and chocolate chai. They use the facilities at Kalamazoo Can-Do Kitchen, where they got their start almost a decade ago.

Perkovic and Buffin's husbands worked together in the chemistry department at Western Michigan University, and also crewed a boat in the annual Chicago-to-Mackinac yacht race. Each year, Barb and Tammy would wait for their husbands on Mackinac Island. One year, there was no wind on Lake Michigan which

slowed the sailors to a crawl. It also gave Perkovic and Buffin a chance to get to know one another. They discovered a shared interest in cooking.

"My parents owned a restaurant in Silver Lakes (Ade's Glass Tap, now called the Lakeview Inn)," Perkovic said. "I grew up there. For me to do this is comforting." Once they had their granola recipes worked out, they started with a table at the Texas Township Farmers Market, alongside custom-made birdhouses and plant decorations they also worked on.

"We had dirt on one side, and granola on the other," Perkovic said. "I did the birdhouses and painted garden labels. Tammy did the plant displays. We both labored over those hyper tufta pots and the cement bird baths."

The granola was popular right away; they did rely on their own financing for the first year or so, but after that, sales were enough to pay for ingredients and space at the Can-Do Kitchen. The Adventures of Barb and Tammy became a part-time business in about 2008. Perkovic is formerly a teacher in Dowagiac, and now works part-time as an usher at Cheney Auditorium. She has no intention of giving up on granola-making, though.

"We are a hobby client (of the Can-Do Kitchen); we're not doing this for money," Perkovic said. "When people taste it, they say, 'Wow,' that's what we really like."

Perkovic said she agrees with the idea that it's "never too late" to get a business going. She enjoys the fact that granola-making and selling is a social experience. "I get to talk to Tammy for four hours a week and all the people at the farmers markets", she said.

She credits the Can-Do Kitchen for help in making their idea of locally made granola into a reality. The organization's support in operating a small business — everything from marketing to licensing — meant Perkovic and Buffin could spend more of their time perfecting their recipes. "I like less risk-taking, it's more indicative of my personality", she said. "You have to consider all the risks, but go for it!"

The Adventures of Barb and Tammy granola is available at the Texas Township Farmers' Market, the Bank Street Farmers Market in Kalamazoo (and the Winter Market in the same location), the Portage Market and Sawall Health Foods, 2965 Oakland Drive, www.facebook.com/The-Adventures-of-Barb-and-Tammy-176895662341824



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