

Community news

Scrumptious local kosher treats on the rise

By



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Some kosher Israeli products, such as Osem cakes, are available in today's market, thanks in part to preservatives.

But, there is nothing like a homemade treat to end a festive meal. Even if one does not have time to make it, there is now another choice – ones that are not only Kosher Parve, but also made locally in small batches; they're also gluten free: decadent macaroons.

These macaroons (and other products) are made by Winnipeg's Piccola Cucina ("little kitchen"). The company was founded by mom and daughter Italian duo, Anita and Pina Romolo, who have been baking together since Pina was very young.

When Anita and Pina found themselves out of work in 2009, they decided to open up shop - at first selling biscotti.

Today, Anita spends most of her time in their gluten free and kosher certified commercial kitchen on Keewatin Street in Winnipeg, while Pina keeps busy selling the products and developing their business.

"The business evolved over the years from making biscotti to making amaretti, a traditional Italian macaroon made with a base of almonds," said Pina. "In 2011, gluten free was becoming more prevalent. And so, we decided to just make Italian-inspired almond macaroons using amaretti as our base product and phased out the biscotti.

"The macaroons were inherently gluten free, so we pivoted and changed direction, deciding to manufacture only gluten free products made with the goodness of almonds.

"The first five years of our business was spent perfecting the product, creating different flavours, understanding the natural food industry and potential consumer, and innovating new product that included a sweetened and an unsweetened pie shell."

Pina had been approached on different occasions by rabbis representing different organizations, offering kosher certification for their products.

After much research and getting to know the market, Pina decided that kosher is an important certification. She found that it is important not only for those who keep kosher, but for others as well, due to the perception of kosher that many products which receive kosher certification are healthier, safer, more nutritionally enhanced, and prepared hygienically.

Once they decided to get kosher certified, the Romolos next had to sift through the different certification options. They decided to choose EarthKosher, as they liked the way they do business.

"I interviewed a few of their current clients, other food manufacturers in the U.S., and everyone was pleased with their no nonsense approach to certifying products," said Pina.

"The team at EarthKosher made it easy for us to understand what keeping kosher means and how it applies to our food manufacturing business. They also understood us and our small business, and made it affordable to become Kosher Parve certified." According to EarthKosher's website, EarthKosher provides kosher certification to over 350 companies in 20+ countries and growing. It was founded in 2004 by CEO Zachary Goldman, with the vision of assisting companies to become kosher certified in an affordable and accepted manner.

Their core values include an absolute commitment to straight-forward business practices, compassion for small businesses, and specialization in the natural products industry.

EarthKosher's Rav Hamachshir (Senior Kashrus Administrator), Rabbi Zushe Yosef Blech of Monsey, NY, is considered a leading authority on the integration of all aspects of modern food technology with regard to kosher certification requirements.

Right now, Pina is in the midst of working with different Jewish organizations to introduce Piccola Cucina to a broader audience. "I have just begun my work on presenting our products to synagogues, including a recent meeting with Chef Joel Lafond of Shaarey Zedek, in hopes of making our products available for catering functions," said Pina. "I also look forward to meetings with Bermax, as well as the Fairmont kosher kitchen."

Piccola Cucina's products are unique, as Pina explained, "they are made with all natural ingredients, getting back to basics, and enjoying time with family and friends...which was just made that much easier, even when hosting people with nutritional and/faith restrictions."

Piccola Cucina offers six flavours of Italian-style almond macaroons that are free from gluten, dairy, grains, soy, corn, and yeast, that are vegetarian and low in sodium, and that are great for low carbohydrates, high protein, and paleo lifestyles.

Flavours include amaretti (original almond), chocoretti (chocolate), pistachioiretti (pistachio), limonetti (lemon), walnutt (walnut), and coconutti (coconut).

Recently, Piccola Cucina added almond pie shells – both sweetened and unsweetened – to their offerings. Like the mac-



Mother-daughter duo Anita (left) and Pina Romolo

aroons, the slightly sweetened shell is free from gluten, dairy, grains, soy, corn, and yeast, is vegetarian and low in sodium, and great for low carbohydrates and paleo lifestyles. The unsweetened and vegan pie shell is free from gluten, dairy, soy, corn, and yeast, is low in sodium, and is great for savoury dishes or for diabetics to enjoy.

The company's future plans include continual expansion across Canada in the natural and specialty food arena, as well as branching out to export to the U.S..

Piccola Cucina products can be ordered online at piccolacucina.ca, as well via many local retailers, such as, DeLuca's, GJ Andrews, Red River Coop, Save on Foods, and Vita Health stores (as well as across the country).

A full listing of retailers is available at the Piccola Cucina website and more information can also be found via social media platforms (i.e. Facebook at facebook.com/piccolacucinainc, twitter at [@piccolacucina](https://twitter.com/piccolacucina), and instagram at [piccolacucinainc](https://instagram.com/piccolacucinainc)).





JEWISH CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE
Strengthening Lives in Keeping with Jewish Values

Taking Steps Bereavement Support Group

Thursdays, January 26th to March 23rd
7:00 to 9:00pm

Jewish Child and Family Service
Asper Jewish Community Campus, 123 Doncaster Street

This non-denominational eight week program is specially designed for those who have experienced the death of a loved one. Its aim is to provide support, education and healing through the difficult journey of grief.

Contact Shelley Levit at 204.477.7430 or slevit@jcfswinnipeg.org if you would like to participate in this group.