West Linn Tidings: Gingerbread Turns Into Hot Seller

By Julie Russell - 12/03/03

For Cheryl Albers of West Linn, the holidays mean much more than the customary visits to Santa Claus, last-minute shopping sprees, and searches for the perfect Christmas tree.

That's because Albers will be extremely busy over the holidays building houses. Gingerbread houses, that is.

Albers runs a licensed kitchen in Oregon City called Gingerbread Traditions that sells and ships fully assembled, undecorated gingerbread house kits. "The gingerbread houses are baked and assembled - that is the key," said Albers. "I can't tell you how many times people tell me that they tried to bake one, and it was a disaster."

So, the key attraction to Albers' products is that parents don't have to do the mixing, baking and building of these gingerbread dwellings, which take a special type of gluey frosting to assemble. Instead, they can simply open up a kit and have everything at their fingertips to decorate a gingerbread residence. It's like having instant arts and crafts, without having to be crafty.

"It's so easy," said Albers. "All you have to do is whip up the frosting, and you've got an instant party." Albers said that parents love to buy her kits for everything from children's birthday parties to holiday events to family gatherings. Others use them for school events, Girl Scout projects or senior center activities.

In fact, people from ages 3 to adult, both males and females, like to decorate gingerbread houses, and these residences may be created at all times of the year.

"November and December will always be the busiest, but there is a real draw for these kits for birthday parties that are different," she said.

Not only does Albers supply traditional gingerbread houses for the holidays, but she also sells gingerbread doghouses, cabins and shops. Prices for each kit range from $11.95 for a small cabin to $21.95 for a large house or shop.

And Albers has thought of virtually everything clients may need to assemble the perfect edible home. Each gingerbread house comes with a bag of frosting mix, a decorator bag and tip, full instructions, loads of colorful candies and gingerbread people. Optional items include trees, roof parts, flowerpots, and for the doghouses, gingerbread dogs.

She'll even deliver orders to clients in the Lake Oswego and West Linn area. Customers may

also stop by her Oregon City shop to pick up their orders, or order her products over the Internet and pay shipping charges. Most orders are filled within two days.

Albers moved her baking operations to Oregon City about 18 months ago and spent six months remodeling a small kitchen. It was difficult to get the spot up to code for plumbing and electrical operations, but the result was a clean, bright bakery, well stocked with all the necessary gingerbread ingredients and supplies.

The smell of gingerbread in the air is enough to make you want to eat one of her houses on the spot.

She first got the idea for her business six years ago when she made gingerbread houses for her young children's birthday parties. She first started with small gatherings of about four or five birthday guests, but now she's graduated to parties of up to 17 kids, ages 6 to 12.

"It just kept growing, and then people wanted to make the houses for themselves," she said.

So, Albers started making extra gingerbread houses on the side for her friends until she found herself almost overloaded with orders several years ago. That's when she decided to launch Gingerbread Traditions into an actual corporation.

"The thing I love the most are the kids and how much fun they have with gingerbread houses," she said. "They can become engaged with this activity for up to two hours." Gingerbread Traditions is located at 514 Main Street in Oregon City. To order a gingerbread house kit, call 503-656-4691, visit the company Web site www.gingerbreadtraditions.com or send an e-mail note to her at gingerbreadtradtions@yahoo.com.