

DOUGH TO DOOR

Get your home-made baking—just like mom’s!— delivered fresh to your door. . .

Who could ask for anything more? I get to do what I love, and have a great view at the same time!” This from Bev O’Hara, a woman who took a leap of faith in November of 2009 when she transformed a small room in her Union Bay home—overlooking picturesque Baynes Sound—into Just Like Mom’s Bakery.

“I’ve always baked,” says O’Hara with a laugh. She holds her arm out to waist height from her short frame: “Since I was this high! I baked with my mom, so it’s something that’s been a constant in my life, but it’s only recently that I ‘came out’ as a baker, so to speak.”

Now 56, O’Hara grew up in Kyle, Saskatchewan. Her first trade also had her working magic with her hands—as a florist. While in her early 20s she started a small greenhouse and sold the plants she’d grown, plus ran a flower shop. Under her green hands that small shop bloomed into a large commercial business in the 20 years she ran it. When she decided to sell the business, O’Hara hired on as the production manager of a similar operation in Saskatoon. She worked there annually from January to July, overseeing the growing of their plants, and although she enjoyed the work, missed her own home in Kyle.

When she heard of a dude ranch close to Kyle that was looking for a cook for their summer season, O’Hara took on the task. “It was an easy job for me,” she says. “I had to provide three meals a day of good farmhouse cooking, and the guests ate what was offered—there wasn’t a menu. It suited me well, and



Photo by Boomer Jerritt

“We think home delivery is a really nice service to offer and our customers appreciate freshly baked food,” says Bev O’Hara, mixing up some home-baked treats in her Union Bay bakery, Just Like Mom’s.

of course, baking was an intrinsic part of the daily fare. I did that for five years, but it was the winters I grew tired of. I began to look online for work in BC, on the coast and lo and behold, there was a job for the curling club in Campbell River. I was the concession manager and catered to banquets and parties and anniversaries, that sort of thing. That was a winter job, of course, but after one winter on the coast, I decided I wasn’t going back to freezing cold Saskatchewan winters. I worked summers in a fishing lodge for a while, then the Campbell River Golf Club.”

After four years in Campbell River O’Hara met her partner, Franc Charpentier, another small business entrepreneur who runs a cash register company. O’Hara moved to Union Bay and she and Charpentier decided to buy a mobile coffee van. Home-made goodies were a natural addition to

complement their drinks. As the coffee business was usually for special events and festivals, which tended to fall on weekends, O’Hara was also cooking for The Pier Pub in Comox.

Laughing, O’Hara says it was an accident that led to her launching Just Like Mom’s into a business on her own as a baker. A colleague she met and worked with at The Pier, Kevin Munroe, decided to open his own bistro-style restaurant, The Mad Chef. O’Hara was going to be his partner in providing baked goods, breads, buns, ciabattas (a special pizza-style dough that’s crispy on the outside and bubbly and soft on the inside) and so on.

“When I went into the new building with Kevin, we took one look at each other and said, ‘This isn’t going to work.’ The kitchen is far too small for a baker and a chef. I looked into the possibility of baking somewhere else and supplying Kevin that way.”

After checking out available rental space and weighing the costs of converting a space into a bakery, which seemed too expensive, “Kevin had the brainwave that I should cook from home,” says O’Hara. “I thought about it for a while, talked in over with Franc, and found out what the health requirements would be, and decided I would give it a go. We converted a room in our home that had been full of junk into this bakery.”

Since that decision, O’Hara’s compact bakery has been providing an ever increasing number of local businesses with buns, breads, scones, cookies and

brownies. Showing canny business acumen, O’Hara also began to offer home deliveries.

Her face lights up as she describes a part of her business that is obviously close to her heart. “There are lots of older people who don’t want to be baking for themselves, yet they’re used to home baked food. We now have a number of seniors who order from us.”

She smiles as she explains more about this unique part of her business. “Quite a few of our customers don’t get out a lot, so when we arrive with their order, we’re perhaps the only people they’ve talked to that day. We’re more than happy to chat with them for half an hour or so. A woman who now lives in California came up for the Olympics, and came over to visit her mother in Union Bay. She saw one of our fliers and asked us to start making deliveries to her mom, who was thrilled! We think our home deliveries are really important.

“We take half a dozen buns or cookies to lots of people,” says O’Hara. “We ask the order be at least \$25, but that’s easy to get to, and people put some products in their freezers. We think it’s a really nice service to offer and our customers appreciate freshly baked food. We take orders into Courtenay every morning to The Mad Chef, The Coffee Love Bug, Brambles Market and The Pier Pub, so we add the home deliveries in. We’ve recently started supplying The Royston Shell and the Union Bay Market with scones and cookies too.”

O’Hara’s baking sounds extremely creative. “I make scones for The Coffee Love Bug and began to try out different ingredients. I make a Greek Goddess scone with lots of feta cheese, avocado and basil pesto, a Mediterranean Goddess with feta

cheese again, spinach, and olives and a Southwestern with peppers and havarti cheese. It’s great fun—I think of a cool name and mix tasty ingredients together. I make berry scones too, of course, cranberries, apricot and oranges, blueberry and lemon, and cinnamon and raisin scones. I have a basic buttermilk recipe that I adapt to whatever I think will be tasty. I use yogurt in my sweet dessert scones, too.

“I get lots of good ideas from Kevin,” O’Hara adds. “I’m going to try a smoked buffalo scone and my husband came up with a good idea—The Couch Potato. It’s going to have beer, cheese and potato chips.

As O’Hara’s grandson is diabetic, she’s been experimenting with baked goods that are suitable for people on restricted diets, although she doesn’t plan to make gluten-free doughs. “That requires more space,” she explains, “as there has to be a special place only for gluten-free flours to be used. The flour can’t be contaminated with anything else, and other people provide that service.”

Although scones and cookies are the most popular items O’Hara bakes, she’s pulling out a tray of plump bread buns from the oven as she speaks. “I make breads and loaf muffins too,” she says.

“This business suits me down to the ground” she adds. “I’m not an early-riser baker. I don’t like getting up at 4 o’clock in the morning and this way I can choose my own hours. If I want to start a batch of bread at 9 o’clock at night, I can do that. While things are cooking I can putter about my own house or do something on the computer.”

O’Hara points to a gleaming stainless steel bowl and mixing arm. “I just recently invested in a small commer-

cial dough-mixer,” she says. “My other ones were smaller and, besides, they’ve done me great service for 25 years—I didn’t want to over-tax them!”

Such is the success of her home baking that O’Hara is contemplating moving her business to a larger shed on her property. “If I had someone else to help me with preparation, I could make more items, I could make cakes and so on, but this space is too small,” she says, gesturing at the space around her, which is approximately 3×4 metres. “I made a special birthday strawberry cheese cake for a Union Bay man and he said ‘Oh, you’ll be getting lots more orders for these!’ But I’m not set up for it.”

“Although,” she continues with a gleam in her eye. “we experimented with doing lots of canning and preserving last year, and that might become another branch of our business. There’s any amount of people who grow too much food to eat in the season and either don’t want—or don’t know how—to can and preserve their produce. And again, lots of older people who grew up preserving their own food and making their own pickles don’t feel able to undertake that task anymore. We could offer that service, perhaps. If somebody wants to buy cucumbers when they’re in season and cheaper but doesn’t want the bother of pickling them, we could help.”

For O’Hara, working at home is the icing on the cake. “I love working at home” she says. “I’ve always had my own businesses, and although I might make more money working for someone else, this is great. I mean, who could ask for anything more?”

To order Dough to Door deliveries from Just Like Mom’s contact Bev O’Hara at 250-335-0239 or visit JustLikeMoms.ca, where O’Hara’s current menu is on display.