

Palatine woman enjoying second year as creator of Hannah Banana Bread

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By **Kim Mikus**

If the caterer would have arrived on time for Hannah's christening party, Lisa Spinner's business may never have happened.

Spinner and her husband had a house full of people after their daughter's baptism.

When the caterer didn't show up on time, Lisa put out the homemade banana bread that she had planned on serving later.

Her guests loved it. Some friends joked that she should start a business selling the sweet product.

One, an attorney, called Lisa the next day and asked if she was really going to start a business based on the bread. Thinking it sounded like a good idea, she said, "yes." He said the business needed a name.

"How about Hannah Banana Bread?" she said since it was her daughter's party.

Now in her second year of business, the former undercover investigator for the Cook County state's attorney's office is selling about 400 loaves of the bread a week. That number is expected to climb as Spinner recently landed a contract selling her bread at Sunset Foods, a grocery store with locations in Libertyville, Highland Park, Northbrook and Lake Forest.

"The product is selling very well," said Frank Lomoro, director of purchasing, adding that it's drawing repeat customers. It's not easy to get a new item in a grocery store. Lomoro gets several requests to market fresh-baked products every month. To make the cut, the food must be produced in a safe baking facility that follows specific procedures.

And it must taste very good. "Everyone in my office who tried the banana bread really liked it," he said, adding that it also cut well.

Initially, Spinner baked in the kitchen of her Palatine home, churning out eight loaves at a time.

When the business was just three months old, Spinner was baking almost 24 hours a day and was frazzled and tired.

"I was the donkey running behind the cart," she jokes. And to make it even worse, her daughter wasn't sleeping through the night. The couple also has a 4-year-old son, Jonathan. Spinner realized the volume was too much for her kitchen to handle, but she wasn't willing to compromise on quality.

Last summer, a mutual friend introduced her to the owner of Evanston-based Sugar and Spice Extraordinary Sweet Treats, a food manufacturer of fine baked goods. The Evanston company now exclusively produces the bread, which recently received CRC-D Kosher certification. "I wanted to keep the home-cooked quality," Spinner said. The entrepreneur, who grew up in Evanston and Skokie, continues to use real bananas, real eggs and no preservatives. This was important to Spinner because she spent years perfecting the recipe.

She started with an old recipe she found for banana bread, believed to be her grandmother's. However, the back of the recipe card was smeared and she couldn't make out how much of each ingredient to put in the bread.

"I made it and my first loaf was awful," Spinner said. The 33-year-old continued to perfect the formula until it turned into the moist bread it is today. She sprinkles the bread with pure cane sugar to give it a crisp topping. Specialty ingredients are added to the base recipe to provide different flavors, resulting in a fresh blend of texture and sweet taste, Spinner said. Top sellers include chocolate chip, white chocolate chip caramel walnut, blueberry, raisin and plain. Other flavors include strawberry coconut, honey, butterscotch caramel and peanut butter chocolate chip.

The bread is delivered to local retail outlets within 24 hours of production. It can be found at coffee houses including: Miei Amici Cafe, 324 E. Main St., Barrington; Newport Coffee, 1121 Half Day Road, Bannockburn; Whistle Stop, 51 W. Wilson St., Palatine; Norma's Coffee Corner, 189 W. Northwest Hwy., Palatine; and Harper College. The bread can be ordered and shipped for personal or corporate consumption and is a popular gift, Spinner said. It is available in two sizes: a mini-loaf, about 13 ounces and a 2.5-pound loaf. The price for the large loaves ranges from \$12 to \$16. Some outlets cut a large loaf into eight or nine slices, sold for between \$1.50 to \$2.80 per slice.

Spinner's husband, Pete, who recently started his own public relations firm, helps her market the product. While she admits she's busy, Lisa enjoys her new career. "I never thought in a million years that I'd be selling banana bread," she says with a laugh. For more information, call (847) 934-7480.

• *Kim Mikus' column appears Tuesdays and Fridays. Send news to her at 50 Lakeview Parkway, Suite 104, Vernon Hills, IL 60061; or at Kmikus@dailyherald.com.*