

● MY GRANDMA'S
COFFEE CAKES OF NEW
ENGLAND

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2007 PROJECTED SALES: \$6.2 MILLION

HQ: BOSTON

EMPLOYEES: 32

SPECIALTY: COFFEE CAKES

BOB KATZ, PRESIDENT: "THIS IS
THE KIND OF PRODUCT THAT
PEOPLE'S GRANDMAS
MADE."

All-natural ingredients are
what make My Grandma's
Coffee Cakes of New
England a favorite of many.

Great 'Grandma'

My Grandma's Coffee Cakes are a media and celebrity phenomenon because they are made with high-quality ingredients and are 'grandma-approved.' **BY KATHRYN JONES**

MY GRANDMA'S COFFEE CAKES OF NEW ENGLAND'S COFFEE CAKES have become so popular, says President Bob Katz, you need a reservation just to get your hands on one. The Boston-based company was founded in 1990 by a man Katz affectionately calls "The Cake Nazi."

"You remember 'The Soup Nazi' from 'Seinfeld,' right?" he asks. "Well, we called him 'The Cake Nazi' because if you didn't show up on time, he wouldn't sell you a cake. You had to call in advance to make a reservation and give him your phone number. If you didn't show up, he'd call your house and ask, 'Why didn't you buy this cake?'"

"Or if you went in just a few minutes late, he'd say, 'You were supposed to be here at 12 p.m. See that guy? I sold him your cake. No cake for you this week!' He did this all the time. He absolutely terrified people. My mother sent me over there on Mother's Day in 1992. I told her, 'It's just down the street. Why don't you go get it yourself?' She said, 'I know, but the last time I went in there, the guy yelled at me and I'm scared. Will you go instead?'"

"I tried one," he continues. "And I said, 'This is phenomenal! I've got to get involved somehow.'" Katz owned a small cleaning supply company at the time and started taking extra cakes with him to appointments at stadiums, parks and even Coca-Cola bottling plants. "Seven out of 10 would call me back and ask me to come Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, hoping I would bring them another cake," he says.

"So I went back to 'The Cake Nazi' and said, 'I'm going to need about 10 more cakes.' He said, 'I'm too busy!' and wouldn't sell me the cakes. So instead of getting angry, I said, 'You look like you could use some help.'"

Katz took time off from his job and began working 73-hour weeks at the shop with the owner, secretly hoping to someday turn the small bakery into a trademarked, national franchise. He sold everything he owned, moved in with his parents and bought the original owner out. "For the first three years, we were making nothing," he recalls. "But I didn't care; I knew it was going to be something."

LET THEM EAT CAKE

My Grandma's Coffee Cakes of New England has since catapulted into a Hollywood and media phenomenon. "We produce the world's most critically-acclaimed coffee cake," Katz asserts. "I've been in the *Boston Globe's* gossip column because celebrities like Henry Winkler and Mischa Barton have been spotted eating my cake." Katz himself has been dubbed "The P.T. Barnum of Coffee Cakes" by members of the media nationwide, he says with a chuckle.

In Hollywood, word got around. Tony Curtis had gotten wind of the cakes and presented them as Christmas gifts to several of her friends and family, including daughter Jamie Lee Curtis. "Arnold Schwarzenegger was one of the first people to call our new number, 1-800-8Grandma," Katz notes. "I thought it was some wise guy doing a bad Henry Kissinger. 'Whey's my cake?'"

"I said to my assistant, 'Take this call, will you? This guy thinks he's Henry Kissinger. I came back and the assistant says, 'Do you know who that was? That was Arnold Schwarzenegger.' Jamie Lee Curtis had given Arnold a cake for Christmas, and he was calling to order more."

WHY THEY'RE POPULAR

Katz calls the coffee cakes "the ultimate comfort food" because "this is a product that gives you a pleasant scent, a pleasant taste and a pleasant memory," he explains. "This is the kind of product that people's grandmas made; yet none of them could make it better."

He says that's because the cakes are completely all-natural

with no trans fat or artificial flavorings, coloring or preservatives. The company uses pure bourbon vanilla from the Bourbon Islands, farm-fresh eggs, cultured sour cream that has been soured naturally, and Mariani walnuts from the famous Mariani orchards in Northern California.

"They're world-known as being amongst the best walnuts," Katz asserts. "They have a lot of oil still in them, so other than pure soybean oil, we don't use additional oils. That keeps the cake nice, moist and authentic."

My Grandma's Coffee Cakes of New England is also kosher-certified. "To make it kosher-certified is a byproduct of the fact that we don't bake on Saturdays and we only use high-quality ingredients that don't conflict with cultural laws," Katz says. "Because we're already doing these things that meet the kosher standards, why not have a rabbi come in and certify it?"

"We actually exceed kosher standards and people should know that it means that it comes from clean facilities. A rabbi is like a health department but tougher, actually. That's good for us because they come in and do inspections by surprise, and that keeps us on our toes."

Katz says My Grandma's Coffee Cakes of New England earns half of its annual sales during the last 10 weeks of the year. "We do have to put people on a reservation system in order to get their cakes on time," he admits, adding that "The Cake Nazi" would be proud. "If somebody sends you this cake, you remember who sent it because they went out of their way to send you something special. That's not an advertisement. That's a fact." ■

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