

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2009

GOING GLUTEN-FREE



STAFF PHOTOS: JOHN BELL

Chef Dawn Chiniewicz (above) presents a plate of gluten-free Della Nonna pasta at Mama's Restaurant and Cafe Baci in Hackettstown. Below: Emily Wexler of Great Meadows enjoys the pasta.

People avoiding glutens now have more options when eating out or taking out

By MEGHAN VAN DYK
STAFF WRITER

Tom Schiano saw a unique business opportunity when a 7-year-old customer at his family's restaurant, Mama's Restaurant and Cafe Baci, began asking questions about menu items.

The girl had celiac disease, so she had to be certain her dinner not only didn't contain items made from gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley, but that nothing on her plate had come in contact with anything that did. A bread crumb could make her sick.

"We didn't want her to feel uncomfortable, so we made her a small menu of gluten-free items," Schiano said. "Then word got out, and before we knew it, people began to come in looking for that menu."

To fill the need, Schiano took a step last year to create an entire gluten-free menu and spent \$25,000 to revamp his kitchen so those items are cooked in separate pots and pans with separate utensils on a different stovetop and are delivered to diners on special gluten-free plates.

Customers in search of peace of mind that their special dinner out is gluten-free have flocked to the Hackettstown establishment from New York City, Clark and Bedminster, Schiano said.

"I want to be an innovator," he said, "to show people they don't have to give up their favorite foods just because they can't have gluten."

A chronic, inherited autoimmune disease that can lead to malnutrition, celiac disease affects 1 in 130 peo-

FOR MORE INFORMATION

MAMA'S RESTAURANT AND CAFE BACI, 260 Mountain Ave., Hackettstown, 908-852-2820, www.mamascafebaci.com

JAKE BAKES, 973-588-3513, www.jakebakes.com

BURDEN FREE FOODS, 973-886-6755, www.burdenfreefoods.com

ple, or about 2 million people nationwide. In people diagnosed with the disease, gluten can damage the lining of the small intestine, reducing its ability to absorb nutrients from food, according to a health Web site.

Gluten is found in a variety of foods beyond bread and pastry. It is found in ice cream and ketchup and nonfood products such as lip gloss. For safety reasons, the general rule of thumb followed by most is to accept only packaged foods that fully list the ingredients.

"You get diagnosed, then told no pizza, no beer and start tomorrow," said Lynn Cicero, a Morristown-based dietitian who specializes in celiac disease. "It can be a real blow to people. You get a whole range of reactions, from disbelief to despair to acceptance."

For Madison resident Jessica Glickman, 21, the news she received in April that she had celiac was all those things.

"It was shocking, and I didn't understand why it took so long to figure it out," Glickman said. "But at the same time I was relieved that it wasn't something worse."

After hearing about what she couldn't eat, Glickman said she cried.

"Not because I lost food,



but I knew it would change my life in other ways — dinners out with friends, what I ate during the holidays," she said. "If I go out, I either bring my own food or don't eat."

But Morris residents living with celiac disease or a wheat allergy have quite a few places to turn. Mama's Restaurant and Cafe Baci serve up main course meals including pizza and pasta dishes, while Jake Bakes in Boonton offers cookies, granola and homemade marshmallows and Burden Free Foods in Morristown prepares homemade bread, pies and cakes.

The businesses are part of an industry that is expected to reach \$1.7 billion by 2010, according to the National

Foundation for Celiac Awareness.

Gluten-free products grow

Tiffanie Melius, owner of Jake Bakes, got into the gluten-free market after her son Jake was diagnosed with life-threatening food allergies. The Boonton mom put her son, now 9, on a restricted gluten diet and quickly realized the painstaking care that goes into the sometimes pricey specialized products.

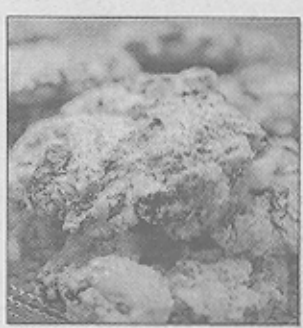
Melius, who has a background in marketing, and her chef friend started Jake Bakes, offering treats such as gluten- and nut-free cookies at the Boonton farmer's market. The product offerings grew, then business expanded online and to 30 natural food stores and coffee shops spanning Virginia and New York.

As of this month, Jake Bakes' caramel corn and granola will be carried at Whole Foods markets across the northeast.

All products are free of gluten and wheat, dairy, egg, peanut, tree nuts and shellfish. Some are also vegan.

"There is never cross-contamination," Melius said. "It means a lot to a lot of people to know that they can enjoy something that is not going to make them sick."

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STAFF PHOTOS: BOB KARP

Co-owners (photo left) of Burden Free Foods in Morristown, Martine Marcus (left) and Judy Mancini, specialize in gluten-free baked goods. Cherry-chocolate oat cookies (above) are one of their desserts safe for people with celiac disease to eat.

This March 2 Obama taking White House the White House's greatest food.

The d

By J.M.
THE ASSOCI

Want to see Americans a first 10 year century? T should do it.

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Gluten-free

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Martine Marcus' foray into the gluten-free realm was slightly more intentional.

The Morristown resident started Go Organics, a catering company dedicated to cooking using locally grown ingredients. It also prepared dishes for vegan/vegetarians and people who have gluten allergies. Because of the demand, Marcus and business partner Judy Mancini switched gears a bit to focus on gluten-free food in their Burden Free Foods bakery to demonstrate that those maintaining the diet don't have to sacrifice taste and quality.

Burden Free Foods' gluten-free creations, including cherry-chocolate oat cookies or harvest pear with pear and pumpkin, pecan and chocolate pies, are available at the Health Shoppe in Morristown, the Morristown farmer's mar-

A chronic, inherited autoimmune disease that can lead to malnutrition, celiac disease affects 1 in 130 people, or about 2 million people nationwide. In people diagnosed with the disease, gluten can damage the lining of the small intestine, reducing its ability to absorb nutrients from food.

ket, and orders can be placed by phone and picked up at their kitchen. The two offer cooking classes and recently contracted with Denville schools to provide gluten- and peanut-free snacks for students a few times a week.

"Gluten-free is everywhere. Even big supermarkets like Acme have dedi-



STAFF PHOTO: JOHN BELL

Tiffanie Melius, co-owner of Jake Bakes, holds some of her gluten-free products. Melius' son Jake has celiac disease, and she and her business partner were inspired by him to create these tasty, gluten-free products.

cated sections to gluten-free food," Marcus said. "But we're really lucky to have places in Morris County

where it is produced fresh and locally."

*Meghan Van Dyk:
973-428-6633*

Decade

FROM PAGE A11

Which explains the explosion of food trucks.

The trucks themselves aren't new, but the attention they got from serious foodies is. It's also a credit to their inventiveness, quality and deeply ethnic roots. It helps that food

trucks are cheap, both to operate and eat from.

Which brings it back to sushi. At 7-Eleven. It was an on-the-go decade that favored ethnic and affordable.

Whatever the economy does, and whether we eat at home or in restaurants (or even more likely in our cars), that's unlikely to change during the next 10 years.