

Spotlight

Baking business is sweet for siblings

BY JACKIE PILOSSOPH | Contributor

EVANSTON

Brother and sister, Greg and Gretchen Vetter have both been baking since they were kids, and today, the two are still baking.

Now co-owners and managers of Tags, an Evanston icon that has been around since 1937, both Greg and Gretchen realize their shop is one of just a few independent bakeries left, and they attribute that to reputation, quality and a loyal customer base.

"We're like a tradition to so many people," said Gretchen, who with her brother took over Tags when their parents retired in 1999. "We're not commercialized, everything here is homemade. It's personal, and

Tags

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it's all made from scratch."

Tags has been around for 76 years, but was bought by the Vetter's parents, Donald and Janet in 1968, after Donald worked as a baker in several bakeries around Chicago.

"My dad has been in the baking business since he was 13," said Greg, who learned how to bake from his father, as well as by taking several baking science and technology courses. "Our dad was our mentor, and he always told us, 'You've got to make it good or you're not going to stay in business.'"

Tags sells cookies, cakes, pies, breads, donuts, coffee cakes, and other sweet goods, and is famous for their



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Florentine cookie, a baked confection made of sugar, butter, honey, and almonds, and a chocolate bottom.

"We sell so many of them all year long," Greg said, "We sell them to local grocery stores as well."

Cathy Gibson Fay is a real estate attorney in the city, who lives in Winnetka and stops at Tags frequently to pick up Florentines on the way to her open houses.

"They're unique and delicious," said Fay. "When I tell the other brokers I'm having Florentines from Tags they get all excited."

Tags is also known for its custom birthday cakes, which start at \$18.95 and go up to \$113 for a full sheet that serves 60-96 people.

"We have four kids and we do all our birthday cakes from here," said Che Keller of Wilmette. "Saturday our daughter is having a party and we're getting her a Barbie cake. The quality of the cakes are the best."

"Growing up, whenever we had a birthday party, we had to have a Tags cake," said Sandra Smith of Evanston, who said she's been coming here since 1953.

Truly a family business, Gretchen said it can be challenging working together, but that she and Greg really do get along.

"He's a really good baker, and he's always trying new things," she said. "He knows what he's doing."

"She keeps things running

out here and she builds the customer relationships," Greg said of his sister. "She has a following."

For Valentine's Day, Tags is baking heart-shaped cookies, cupcakes, petit fours, marzipan hearts, heart cakes with strawberry filling, and chocolate cake filled with raspberry, and a poured chocolate ganache icing. They are also baking heart shaped tomato bread.

"I'm in here all the time," said Keller. "Their raspberry and white chocolate cookies are amazing, and of course, the Florentines are the best."

"They have the best butter cookies in the city," said Smith. "And his chocolate croissants are as good as the ones I've had in Paris." ■