

POPULARITY IS SPREADING



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

Owner Pam Turkin, left, and Angie Donahue show off a variety of cupcakes available from Just Baked in the Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi. Turkin is opening a fourth location in Royal Oak. Cupcakes are cost savers, she says.

Cupcake craze serves as new recipe for success

BY KAREN DYBIS | Special to The Detroit News

Tiny, tasty and seductive, the gourmet cupcake is strengthening its hold over dessert lovers with specialty bakeries spreading over the region's real estate — and waists.

Just Baked, a Livonia-based cupcake shop, is doubling its size, with two new locations joining stores in Novi and Ann Arbor. One store opens in Royal Oak on Wednesday, and another in Troy's Somerset Collection opens next month.

Meanwhile, the Cupcake Station is feeding its expansion through franchising. Kerry Johnson, Michigan's original cupcake king, is launching his franchise business across the Midwest in April.

Johnson believes the Birmingham cupcake shop could have as many as 10 franchisees by year's end.

A retail trend that originally blossomed on the East and West coasts has

firmly settled here. The recent additions are part of a larger trend, with cupcake kiosks, catering companies and bakeries springing up across Metro Detroit.

The basic recipe may be more than a century old, yet the cupcake has never been hotter or more relevant. In a down economy, cupcakes are a treat many can afford. It has become the Lady Gaga of the dessert world: fashionable, unpredict-

able and worth watching.

"Cupcakes level the playing field when it comes to big-city foodie trends," said Nichelle Stephens, co-editor of Cupcakes Take the Cake, a Web site and blog devoted to the tiny treats. "Cupcakes are more accessible and often more affordable than molecular gastronomy or whatever is the new thing on 'Top Chef.'"

Cupcakes have been a lifesaver of sorts for many retailers, food and otherwise. Johnson sold more than 15,000 cupcakes — at \$2.75 a pop — over Valentine's Day weekend. Nationally, Cold Stone Creamery's sales skyrocketed when it began selling ice cream cupcakes in 2009.

People are replacing traditional cakes with the miniature version for every occasion: birthdays, baby showers, weddings, dinner parties and themed events such as

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