

Pals become partners in bakery

Janet Haas

Four years ago, Jennifer Chapman and Michelle Miller were introduced by a mutual friend after moving to Charlotte within the same week.

As their friendship grew, the women started dreaming out loud about opening a bakery. “The cupcake thing hadn't come to Charlotte yet,” said Chapman, so they knew they had found their niche.

Now, eight months after launching their dream come true, the Polka Dot Bake Shop is thriving and has a staff of 10 employees.

From customized pull-apart cakes to their daily delectable specials (check out the Mexican hot chocolate cupcakes on Fridays), this gourmet bakery fits the bill for any occasion. Have a special request? No problem. Chapman once custom designed a dozen cupcakes – six with guns and six with roses – in honor of the birthday boy's favorite band.

Can't pick up your order? No worries. They deliver.

Families first

The shop in ParkTowne Village is the epitome of a family-friendly business. Since Miller gave birth to her second child in January, she's able to formulate their all-natural, no-trans-fat recipes while her son, Meyer, snoozes in a Pack 'n Play.

“Looking at all the commotion in the kitchen keeps him occupied when he's awake,” Miller said.

Three of their employees are mothers as well. If someone is unable to come to work because of a sick child, often another employee steps in.

The partners, on occasion, even babysit for each other. “As two working mothers, if something comes up, neither of us are hesitant to take the kids,” Miller said. “No one is afraid to get their hands dirty and jump in with the kids at any moment.”

The secret to their success

For Chapman, an accountant with 30 years of cake-decorating experience, and Miller, with a background in restaurant and hotel management, the partnership is a good fit.

“She does things I don't do, and I do things she doesn't do, so it works pretty well,” Chapman said.

What's their secret? Chapman said: “Have a business partner that you trust. Do something that you love. Hire really good employees, and keep them happy. Be flexible with them, too.”

“After working with Michelle on this business ... she is still one of my dearest and closest friends. When I have a chance to catch up with a friend over lunch, she's at the top of my list. That's one of the things I'm most proud of: opening a business with a dear friend and staying dear friends throughout the process,” Chapman said.

Miller said, “There is not a day that doesn't go by that I don't talk to Jen. I would miss talking to her daily about things. We have a wonderful working relationship.”

