

## **Candy maker shares love of chocolate one truffle at a time**

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When a Spokane Valley woman first embarked on a personal journey to learn as much as she could about her longtime hobby, she never realized just how far her love for gourmet chocolate would take her. Now, with a growing home-based business, former Spokane juvenile corrections officer Julia Balassa-Myracle is a Master Chocolatier with a devoted following. Some have even dubbed her the "Truffle Queen" of Spokane as her chocolate delicacies – some infused with such local ingredients as mountain huckleberries and regional wines – have begun to satisfy a national palate.

"There's just so much to learn about chocolate," says Balassa-Myracle, 47. "Chocolate has so much to offer.

"The last two months I've had numerous contacts from retail establishments from around the country," she said. "So the interest is there."

Eighteen months ago she transformed part of her basement into a kitchen and set out to become more aware of chocolate – its rich history, varieties from across the globe, and uses for her company she calls **Chocolate Myacles**.

Balassa-Myracle's offerings of handmade gourmet truffles, bonbons and solids are created using her own recipes with the finest ingredients she can find. Her products are made without fillers, chemicals, artificial preservatives or artificial flavors and therefore have a shorter shelf life than many chocolates.

Her chocolate is imported from Switzerland, Belgium and Venezuela. And she can easily describe how the flavors of South American chocolate are more dense and earthy compared to the Belgian bittersweets.

Each truffle and bonbon she makes is carefully tended during several steps and three-day process that includes ladling, scraping, shaking, infusing, cooling and decorating. Each piece costs \$1.85. Individual solids are 75 cents. Her chocolates also are available in boxes of two to 24 pieces.

She's received accolades for her huckleberry bonbon created by blending the area's handpicked berry delights with a locally produced cream cheese and covered with Belgian semi-sweet chocolate that is topped with a white chocolate drizzle.

Among her solids is the geodesic dome of dark Venezuelan chocolate flavored with Mexican spice cinnamon, a style of chocolate that dates back to the time of the Aztecs.

"People love chocolate. We've been having a love affair with chocolate," she says. "Did you know the first cocoa plantation dates back to 600 A.D. in South America?"

As **Chocolate Myacles** gains popularity, so do the number of local retail shops and grocery stores that sell her chocolates. She has a standing

Valentine's order of 4,000 pieces from Northern Quest Casino. And she's gaining popularity with online orders as well.

In the midst of product testing that includes developing new recipes and documenting shelf life, Balassa-Myracle still marvels at where her chocolates are taking her.

She admits she's nearly outgrown her basement kitchen and has been looking into possible kitchen locations outside her home. She's currently hiring a dishwasher, and she's contemplating adding more employees.

Plus: "In April 2008, I'm going to study in France under the Valrhona Master Chocolate Program. ... I think this is an exciting time for chocolate."

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MORE INFORMATION

**Chocolate Myacles**, 995-1271, [www.ChocolateMyacles.com](http://www.ChocolateMyacles.com).

Valley retail outlets include Halpin's Pharmacy and Treasure Room, Latah Creek Winery, Williams Seafood, Yoke's on Argonne and Mad Hattie's Boutique and Teas.

MEMO: Are you opening a new business in the Spokane Valley? Is your business expanding, moving or remodeling? Are you wondering about that new store that has opened in your neighborhood? Send an e-mail to Juli Wasson at [juliwasson@gmail.com](mailto:juliwasson@gmail.com) or contact us by fax at 927-2175 or by writing to Business Notebook, Valley Voice, 13208 E. Sprague Ave., Spokane Valley, WA 99216.

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