

## THE SWEETEST THING

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Ready for BUSINESS | Regina's Entrepreneurial Spirit

by Chelsea Coupal | Photography by Riley Stewart



artisanal pastries  
treats & cakes

**In the beginning, Kirby and Marcie Punshon employed only themselves. The husband and wife team worked and sold baked goods out of a coffee shop's tiny kitchen. Now, 12 years later, their dessert business occupies almost 8,000 square feet of warehouse space and employs 35 people. **marcicakes**, the couples' wholesale line of pastries, sells up to 60,000 pieces per week to Canadian supermarkets and an international coffee chain. The most recent addition to the couple's baking enterprise, **Koko Pâtisserie**, is a collection of artful, high-end desserts sold out of their loft-like bakery. Even the Koko line of desserts sell up to 3,000 pieces per week.**

**Koko Pâtisserie** opened on June 16th, but the Punshons' treat involvement extends back much further. Marcie started stirring up ingredients with her mom when she was seven years old. Later on, while other teenagers cruised the streets and partied past midnight, Marcie whipped up late-night batches of cookies with her friends at sleep overs.

The baking continued after high school. When Marcie and Kirby married in 1991, they baked their own wedding desserts. Until he met Marcie, Kirby knew little about baking. "He hadn't made cookie dough in his life," Marcie said. However, he knew retail. Growing up, he helped run his family's floral company. Soon after the wedding, in addition to her part time job at a bank, Marcie baked and sold cakes out of their home.

In 1997, in an effort to expand Marcie's after-work cakeselling business into something more, the couple cut a deal with Milanos, a local coffee shop that has since closed. In exchange for a good lease rate, the pair provided the shop with desserts, while continuing to supply their own clients and other local coffee shops with made-from-scratch treats.

In those days, the Punshons' arrived at the coffee shop at 3AM to bake. Kirby left for his job as a hardware salesman at 8AM, while Marcie, bicycled home around 10AM to shower and change clothes before her bank shift.

After leasing space at Milanos for a year, the Punshons' decided they needed more space, so they rented secondfloor kitchen space at Danbry's restaurant now Crave Kitchen & Wine Bar. Again, the couple supplied the dining establishment with desserts.



While at Danbry's, Marcie quit her job at the bank to focus solely on the dessert business.

Fridays were the busiest pastry days, so Marcie baked all day Thursday. In the evening, when Kirby was finished work, he helped her hand-roll hundreds of cookies.

"It doesn't sound like a lot compared to what we do now," Marcie said. "But Thursday nights we missed all the good TV because we were hand-rolling cookies up in Danbrys."

"And I had cookie finger," said Kirby.

What's that?

"Well it just grew, eh? It was just massive," said Kirby, as he examined and wiggled his right index finger.

"It was a lot of fun," said Marcie of her nights spent up in Danbrys.

"It was a blast," agreed Kirby.

While still at Danbry's, Kirby and Marcie heard rumours of an international coffee company coming to Regina, so they decided to see if they could sell **marci cakes** to the franchise. "We were persistent and bothered them enough that they had to come and chat us up," Kirby said. "They [the coffee company] took a gamble on us because we were really tiny, tiny."

Supplying many of the company's western Canadian coffee shops with **marci cakes** enabled the couple to move out of Danbry's kitchen, and into their own space. At the end of 2002, the couple purchased 500 square feet of their current Broad Street warehouse.

Incrementally, the pair purchased more and more warehouse space, until reaching their current amount of space, almost 8, 000 square feet.

"We couldn't have gone in at first and bought the whole thing because the bank ... they would have said we were crazy," Marcie said.

"Well, you have to have a balance sheet and the balance sheet is something we didn't have for a long time," said Kirby.

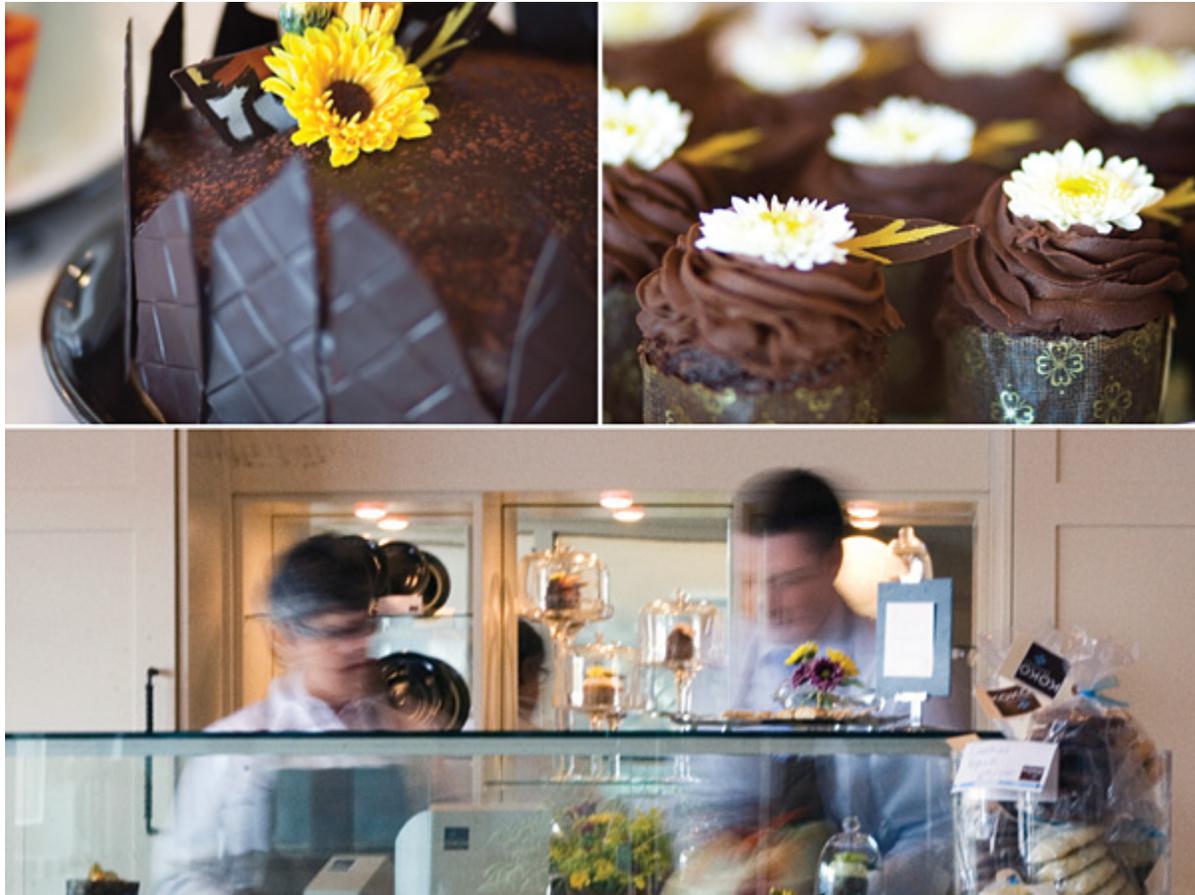
Right now, though, business is thriving. The Punshons', who once whipped and stirred for hours by themselves, now employ 35 people, many of whom were hired from work placement programs run by organizations such as the Cosmopolitan Learning Centre and the Regina Open Door Society.

"We have two Muslim women working with us, and there's a prayer room in the basement for them. It's nothing fancy but ... this was something they needed to live their lives, so why wouldn't we do it?" Marcie said.

The basement might not be fancy, but the front entrance of the Koko bakery resembles a New York City loft, with its vaulted, open-beam ceiling and huge windows.

"Some people have come in and said, "Oh. Am I in Regina?" said Kirby.

Although **marci cakes** are the back bone of the business - "Without **marci cakes**, we would not be able to do Koko," Marcie said - Koko gives the pastry chefs a chance to show off, and adds diversity to the couples' products, by providing higher-end, specialty items along with the wholesale **marci cakes**.



The Koko cupcakes are garnished with daisies and other flowers. (A percentage of all profits gained from the sale of these cupcakes will be donated to the Regina General Hospital's pediatric ward). Although most of the desserts sit under the glass counter at the front of the store, some are displayed individually under pastry cases of varying heights. Mirrors hang on the wall behind the counter, adding to the airy appearance of the shop. Besides the arty treats on display, people can purchase frozen muffins, bars, scone, and cookie dough from the bakery freezer.

Marcie is constantly thinking up new desserts to add to Koko's dessert line-up. In the future, slices of Kirby's favourite dessert, chocolate peanut butter pie, might be slipped under the pastry display case.

The desserts evolve. What about the rest of the business? Does the couple want their enterprise to grow even larger?

"It depends on who you ask," Marcie said with a laugh. "From the two of us working as hard as we did, I never would have guessed in a million years that we would have 35 people working with us ... Kirby foresees. He can see the future, whereas, I can do the recipes. I can taste something and go, 'ok, how can we improve this?'"

"Growth is important," Kirby said. "You have to grow at a good pace. I'm not afraid of growth." 

**KOKO Pâtisserie** is located at 1205 Broad Street call 306.352.0220 or visit [www.kokopatisserie.com](http://www.kokopatisserie.com)