

# Baker's Daughter Grows Up to Manage Family's Business



RICHARD V. FOELLER, Buffalo News

Heino Walters and his daughter, Wendi, make croissants in their Georgetown Plaza, Amherst, bakery.

By BOB BUYER

As a baker's daughter and a bakery manager, Wendi Walters has found that the recipe for financial success calls for Danish pastry, French tarts, German kuchen, apple pie, custard, sliced bread and rolls all flavored with a knowledge of how to greet customers, direct employees and read a balance sheet.

That's a wide spectrum of knowledge for a 24-year-old to have mastered. Ms. Walters has, judging by her performance at Walters Bakery in Amherst's Georgetown Plaza.

The evidence is formidable. Last year, Walters Bakery moved from one Georgetown location to a much larger one. Then, in a repetition of proven merchandising practice of locating successful stores near each other, Walters' former liquor store neighbor has just opened its large new quarters next to the bakery.

ADDITIONALLY, during its decade at Georgetown, the bakery with Ms. Walters up front and her father, Heino Walters, running the ovens, has met the challenge of two other bakeries, one a chain operation and the other a well-established local bakery. Walters has seen both open and close in a neighborhood shopping center.

And finally, a number of prominent area eating establishments regularly call on Walters Bakery to stock their dessert pantries.

"That's a real compliment to us," Ms. Walters smiled.

Through it all, Ms. Walters has remained a hard-working boss who is as much at home with her bakery's cakes as with its cash.

And when she's not concerned with either — which isn't often — she is a bend-and-twist aerobic exercise enthusiast or the driver of

a zippy red Fiat convertible.

The baking business is a Walters family craft. Her father, Heino, came to Buffalo nearly 26 years ago from old Germany. Her uncle still is a baker in a small German town.

"When my uncle came to visit, he was surprised at how different our bakery is from his," Ms. Walters said. "We use different flour and different ingredients than Euro-

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*Ms. Walters said.*

pean bakers. European style wouldn't sell here, just as doughnuts don't sell in small European communities."

Mr. Walters opened his bakery in 1957 in Depew, she recounts. It went well enough so that in 1970 when the Georgetown Plaza opened, Walters Bakery opened there.

Soon after, Heino Walters got out of the Depew bakery he started. "He felt that one bakery was enough," Ms. Walters said.

She started working in the bakery when she was still a pupil at Williamsville's Mill Middle School. "I worked after school and on Saturdays," she remembers.

"My father was against it. He said that I'd be working all my life, and he didn't think I should start so young."

In this case, the willful daughter (the oldest of four Walters children)

had her way. The after-school work turned into part-time summer employment and continued during her high school years at Williamsville South.

"When I was 15, I began hiring some of my classmates as part-time sales clerks," Ms. Walters says. Now, among other assignments, she presides over eight sales clerks who not only wrap the breads, bag the cookies and box the cakes and pies, but also serve coffee and rolls or doughnuts at a half dozen tables in an alcove alongside the sales room.

MS. WALTERS interrupted her on-the-job training for a couple of years to attend Rochester Institute of Technology. "I graduated with a degree in finance and business," she said. After graduation, she returned to the bakery in time to step into a leadership role when her father became ill.

"He's recovered now and he works with our five other bakers," Ms. Walters said. "He can do any of the baking."

The father and daughter daily consult on the next day's baking schedule and on finances and overall policy "when we have time."

"He listens to me, but when he makes up his mind about something, I say, 'Yes, Dad,'" Ms. Walters said.

She does the scheduling, buys the paper products, keeps the books and signs the checks in the hours when she's not behind the counter.

Mornings she arrives about 7 to arrange the breads, cakes, cookies and pastries that have been baked overnight and prepare for the breakfast trade. She carefully watches the sales patterns. "Some products lose money and some make money," she said.

Of pastries, more of a staple in Europe than in the United States, Ms. Walters says that there's an upper price limit. "People will only pay so much for them."

On the cookie side, plain sugar cookies and chocolate chips are top sellers. "We bake from scratch. We don't use prepared mixes," she noted. Any shortening is blended with butter when it's used, she revealed.

Among the bread-type baked goods, bagels and croissants have risen sharply in popularity. "We do croissants, but not bagels," Ms. Walters said. "You need a whole different set-up for bagels."

ESTIMATING HOW much of what item should be baked is a daily exercise for Ms. Walters. How well she performs can be gauged by the amount of day-old items that each morning are sold for reduced prices.

"If we have a lot left in our showcases by the end of the day, I'm in trouble," she said with a grimace.

The weather plays a part. "When the sun is out or it snows, the customers seem to stay away. When it rains, they come in."

Ms. Walters says that the dog days of August and the let-down month of January are a bakery's slowest months. Christmas, with its welter of cookies and cakes, is the busiest season, with Thanksgiving and its pumpkin pies and cakes in second place.

Surrounded by goodies all day and some nights, Mr. Walters confesses to a personal preference for "soft and gooey" baked goods.

Asked what she likes to sell best, the businesswoman, put first things first and replied:

"Everything."