

MICHIGAN BUSINESS

# Mel's Toffee takes care of everyone with a sweet tooth

By Jane Peterson  
For Digital First Media

All small businesses have a great story behind their success and Mel's Toffee is no exception. What started out as a pretzel company back over a decade ago has really hit its stride with toffee over the past year.

Back in 2001, Michelle Williamson made five-layer pretzels for graduation parties, showers and holidays. Everything was done out of her home and made fresh to order. At the time her daughters were in preschool and she considered going into the cottage industry, but the economy took a downturn and the plan was put on hold.

Meanwhile, a friend asked if she made toffee. That simple question was destined to forever change the direction of her emerging company.

"I was curious to try it on my own. I found a recipe, tweaked it and it was instant success. I was sending the toffee with the kids to school. They made friends with their friends. Immediately it was kid approved. Then, the Moms started calling - it was a hit," she said.

What people may be surprised to know is that there is no Mel working for Mel's Toffee. Mel's is an acronym for Michelle and her family: M for Michelle and E and L for her daughters Erin and Lauren. It seems like a perfect fit for this family-owned business since Michelle - who calls herself the Chief Toffee Officer - handles the majority of day-to-day operations herself, but her husband and daughters, who are now in high school, lend a helping hand during events.

"As far as product line goes, I am mainly focused on toffee, new accounts,



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEL'S TOFFEE

Chocolate covered cherry toffee created by Mel's Toffee.

collaborations, developing new flavors and bringing new products to the market," she said. "I have grown from one flavor to nine flavors in total. I rotate flavors through according to season or holiday. I can still do custom orders only upon request with ample lead time."

Mel's Toffee makes people happy and satisfies their sweet tooth.

"People love toffee period," she said. "I feel my toffee has what people are looking for. My toffee has the perfect snap like a cold chocolate bar out of the fridge. Mine has the flavor that people are looking for."

"Mine has the wow factor that blows people away and keeps them coming back for more. What makes mine unique is what I infuse my toffees with. It could be organic oils, fruit which they can taste or the alcohol I infuse my toffees with. It's a win, win, win. Like my logo says, "One bite is never enough...ever!"

Williamson said this a great time to own a business in Michigan because it is a very diverse place to grow and is ever-changing.

"We have the rebirth of Detroit which opens lots of

doors and brings endless opportunities to us all. The craft beer industry is growing by the second sending people to both visit us and to become employed. And, there is the expansive list of farmers markets which give all small food businesses opportunities to grow," she said.

Williamson definitely has and is ready to continue putting in the blood, sweat and tears necessary to develop a successful brand. No stranger to hard work, she paid for half of her tuition all throughout high school at Royal Oak Shrine by working at McDonalds. She went on to pay her way through college by working as a waitress, mainly in the Charley's Crab restaurants. She graduated with from Central Michigan University with a B.S. in science with a concentration in corporate health and a minor in marketing.

Mel's Toffee continues to add new flavors and form new collaborations. Flavors are updated and changed regularly due to the season and holidays. She added that the toffee can also be found at Blake's and Millers Big Red Cider Mills this fall as well.



A display of toffee offered for sale by Mel's Toffee. Flavors include chocolate covered cherry, honey dark run, chocolate peanut butter, sea salt pretzel and coconut curry.

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Michelle Williamson

"I feel the future is bright for Mel's Toffee. Get your sunglasses ready. There are so many directions I can take with this company," she said in an email. "Yes, I will wholesale to stores. But, the possibilities are endless. With a company like this, you have to be very creative and ready to move....all the time."

As her business continues to grow, Williamson said she will be hiring within the state and down the road may look at donating to a Michigan children's charity.



Sea Salt Pretzel Toffee by Mel's Toffee.