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Naperville retiree launches new frozen desserts

By Anna Marie Kukec

At 73, Lou Toste O'Brien was tired of being retired. She had been successful with a group of beauty salons and stopped working a few years earlier. But after some trips to Italy and Russia, and learning the Italian language and how to play bridge, she wanted something more.

"It just wasn't enough for me," Toste O'Brien said.

After making numerous cannoli cakes and Italian desserts and getting rave reviews from her family, she decided to go into business with her mother's recipes. She got the paperwork together in February 2012, but it wasn't until after a trip to Russia that she actually became serious about launching the business.

"I started making cannoli cakes for family and they just loved them. They would say, 'Auntie, can you make this' or 'Auntie, can you make that.' So I thought, maybe I should just sell it," she said.

She launched [Grandma Toste](#), named after her mother Christina Toste, with a product line of cannoli cakes and frozen desserts. She also sells complete dessert kits to make cream filled mini tarts, cannoli and phyllo tarts at home. In addition, Grandma Toste now offers cannoli chips for dipping in cannoli filling.

Grandma Toste's is sold at Casey's Foods in Naperville and Western Springs; Brookhaven Marketplace in Burr Ridge, Darien and Mokena; From Scratch Marketplace in La Grange; Chipain's Finer Foods in Lemont; Prisco's Fine Foods in Aurora; Garden Fresh Market in Naperville; and Lincoln Park Market in Chicago. Her cannoli filling is also used in the desserts at the Naperville Country Club.

She has rented space at a bakery in LaGrange and personally makes all the products, she said.

"It's very time consuming, but I just love it and it's fun," she said.

She also said the experience has "opened a whole new world" for her.

"I had been in the beauty industry for about 40 years, and now I'm in the food industry, and it's a whole new world with different people," she said.

O'Brien, who lives in Naperville with her husband of 20 years, David Zajicek, grew up in her parents' bakery, Finesse Bakery in Boston, and later at their Italian restaurant, Christina's in Forest Park.

In 1970, she started her own business, La Finesse Inc., a group of seven beauty and hair salons that continued operating for about 40 years.

In the meantime, she enjoyed several trips to Europe and China with her husband as well as some trips with groups of friends, she said.

While in Italy she and some friends took classes at the Masseria Marzalossa Cooking School, She also attended Rhodes Cooking School in Lucca and the Tramonto D'oro classes in Praiano.

And if that isn't busy enough, she also runs three to four times a week, exercises regularly and plays golf.

"It's important to take care of oneself," she said.