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## Cooking up treats for four-legged friends

Woodlands men partner in bakery business that caters to canine palates



Frank Ciaccio, left, decorates Texas Longhorn dog biscuits as Jay Kirsch mixes a new batch of treats at their Barker Street Dog Bakery.

**David Hopper:** For the Chronicle

By JACKIE BARKER  
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An English bulldog named Maggie was the inspiration for Barker Street Dog Bakery, a popular booth at the farmers market in The Woodlands Market Street each Saturday morning.

"Our treats are made in our Grogan's Mill kitchen by hand with supermarket-grade ingredients. We sell a variety of cookies, pastries and candies for dogs," said Jay Kirsch, co-owner of Barker Street. He shares baking duties with partner Frank Ciaccio.

When they lived in Old Town Alexandria, Va., they visited pet stores to get treats for Maggie.

"We both liked to bake and decided we could create some treats that were more unique than those in the stores. In time we opened the original Barkley Square Dog Bakery and added a boutique with gift items for dogs ranging from apparel to furniture," said Kirsch, 41.

The partners said Maggie was in charge of public relations at their store; she greeted customers at the door.

Maggie isn't present at their booth in the farmers market because pets aren't allowed, but she is still their inspiration.

"We have cookies that look like dogs and some that look like cookies," said Ciaccio, 44.

Collie Flowers are made with cauliflower and twice baked, and they also make carob-dipped Bih Scottie. On the pastry side, a customer can purchase blueberry muffins, apricot/cranberry popovers, walnut brownies, rawhide pretzels and peanut butter yogurt-filled cannoli.

## **Canine cooking**

In Virginia, Kirsch was a teacher and Ciaccio was in law enforcement. They moved to Grogan's Mill to work in disaster management. They sold their store in Virginia and it continues to thrive.

"This spring we noticed solicitations for vendors for the Market Street farmers market and decided to take out the recipes and start baking again as a fun weekend activity," Kirsch said.

Now preparing for the Saturday morning market is taking most of their spare time, but they are enjoying meeting the dog lovers who come to their booth, and the enthusiastic response they are getting.

"All of our treats are made using all-natural ingredients with no added sugars or preservatives. Our basic cookie recipes are four flavors: chicken, beef, apple/cinnamon and peanut butter," Kirsch said.

Many of the cookies are decorated with yogurt or carob, which looks like chocolate but is safe for dogs.

"We try to make our pastries look as much like one might find in a 'human' bakery as possible. Through trial and error, we usually end up coming pretty close. Our bulldog gets to snack on the mistakes," he said.

## **New recipes**

Ciaccio said they listen to customers for new ideas. After hearing about dogs with gluten or corn allergies, they developed new recipes in consultation with their dog's veterinarian to provide similar-quality treats for dogs with dietary restrictions.

"Our vegan carrots, for example, contain only carrots, organic oat flour, organic vegetable stock and honey, even though true vegans don't eat honey."

The partners also make candies offering peanut butter cups, red yogurt Spaniels and raspberry-flavored Ruff-les. Of course, they make a Great Danish. Special orders for personalized treats and birthday cakes are placed at the booth and picked up the next week.

"UT fans buy the A&M cookies to see their dogs devour the logo. Our Aggie customers buy the Longhorn treats just to watch their dogs break the horns off," Kirsch said.

They have packaged a special assortment of treats for people who want to take a hostess gift to friends who have one or several dogs. Purchases are put in sacks with paw prints or special boxes they have designed.

## **Take-out treats**

Barbara Tedesco, who has a booth two spaces down from Barker Street, says she always make a stop at their booth to take cannolis home to her two schnauzers.

"They look forward to my coming home from the farmers market because they know I will be bringing them something from Barker Street."

Saturday mornings start early for the partners. They try to be at Market Street to set up their booth, No. 19, around 6 a.m., to be ready for the 8 a.m. opening of the market. Early shoppers are often at their booth by 7:30 a.m. Orders may be placed by calling them at 281-298-6128.

The Barker Street label may take on another life. Their booth at the farmers market has led to negotiations with a dog boutique store to carry their products.