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Woman mixes it up with bread

ECO Staff – Laure Cioffi, senior journalist
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This is a weekly series featuring stories about the vendors participating in the Ellwood City Farmer's Market. Who are they? What do they sell? Why do they do it? EllwoodCity.org intends to continue this weekly series until the Farmer's Market ends or we run out of vendors to feature.

ELLWOOD CITY – When Mary McAnallen decided she wanted to learn to bake bread 20 years ago, she had no idea it would turn into a business.

At that time she was working as a machinist in her father's machine shop.

"It was like a woman thing. I thought it would be really cool to bake bread," she said.

But it wasn't as easy as she thought it would be.

She persisted and eventually mastered the art of bread making. She said family and friends enjoyed her bread so much, they wanted to learn how to make it too.



But lugging all those ingredients to a friend's house for a night of baking wasn't easy, so she started mixing ingredients together at home and taking them in plastic bags.

That was the start of the Mary Mac Bakehouse, one of the vendors participating in this year's Ellwood City Farmer's Market.

McAnallen of North Beaver Township sells a variety of already made breads along with mixes that only require canola oil and water. She's also selling her homemade mixes for fruit dip, oat bran muffins and a cheese ball.

She has white, wheat, multigrain, wheat germ and three varieties of rye bread mixes and she's working on a pumpernickel bread mix.

"I'm always playing around with things to see if I can make a mix," she said.

McAnallen said her gauge is her five children ages 18, 16, 15, 12 and 10. If they like something she tries to find the recipe and then turn it into a mix.

While she started making the bread about 20 years ago mainly for her children, McAnallen said she eventually got involved in public speaking about bread making and two years ago she and a friend

opened a store near Mount Jackson.

The Standing Chimney on Paden Road is open the first Saturday of each month and has become something of a haven for local artists, she said.

In addition to McAnallen's mixes, the store features the works of 33 different local artists.

"It's like a casual gallery," she said. "Just about everything is handmade and made within seven miles of the store. We have so many creative people in this area."

McAnallen and her partner in the store Beth Lauchner also make a variety of "green" grocery bags from vintage curtains.

She said they bought the fabric from a woman who had an interior design business dating back to the 1940s.

"There were these boxes and boxes of fabric. We have a lot of really neat fabric," she said.

McAnallen said she intends to continue coming to the weekly Ellwood City farmer's market and Lauchner will watch the store on the Saturdays it is open.



McAnallen said the first week of the farmer's market she sold as many mixes as she did loaves of bread and in the past few weeks she's gotten some repeat customers.

"I was so overwhelmed the first day. People were reading the labels and asking questions. Nobody ever asked me questions before. It's nice," she said.

McAnallen said she enjoys talking about her ingredients and how she makes her mixes because she takes pains to use no fillers or preservatives

She makes the mixes fresh each month, but notes they have a shelf life of about a year.

Her three daughters help by designing and printing her labels.

McAnallen said she does all of this in addition to working part-time at a graphic design/marketing firm.

"I feel very happy. I have found a niche," she said.

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