

Put a in it!

WHO:
Gigi's Cupcakes



WHAT:
Gourmet cupcakes

WHERE:
Wilmette

Gigi's serves up sweet treats

by *Hannah Young*

Gigi's Cupcakes features an array of innovative baked goods, everything from candy bar crunch cupcakes to mocha cheesecakes.

After raising a family, Christine Yaccino, the owner of the shop, wanted to spread her passion for baking and found her chance in this Nashville-originated business.

Store manager Joanne Brandstrader said, "Christine Yaccino discovered Gigi's Cupcakes when she lived in Tampa, Florida several years ago. She made it her goal to open a Gigi's here in Illinois."

As a franchise, the store uses the recipes of Gigi Butler, the company's founder, in order to create a customized menu for every day.

Gigi's Cupcakes doesn't do conventional flavors. Instead, they focus on creating flavors to please their customers. Junior Bridget Knudson said, "They have so many unique options that change everyday. You

could never go to another place and find a Pumpkin Spice Latte cupcake or at least one that is fresh and crisp."

However, Tayyaba Ali, also a junior, had some complaints: "While they have a lot of options, the only thing I'd say is that every cupcake has an overload of frosting. It's too sweet and takes over the cake."

Patrick Browne, a junior and an employee, wanted to find a job as a salesman when he discovered Gigi's.

"Everyone who works there is so nice and cooperative," Browne said, "Plus, it's a cupcake shop and who doesn't love to be around cupcakes?"

Leah Krevitz, another employee, loved the concept of the business and found the ambiance exciting and festive.

"I thought it was good, well presented and conveniently packaged. I like Sprinkles or Molly's better, but Gigi's is a lot closer, which is nice," junior Lily Long said.

Considering proximity, junior Meera Joshi added, "I like that they are in Edens Plaza. Whenever I am near New Trier West or getting my hair cut at Aveda, I can stop by and

get a delicious cupcake."

"We have very strict baking guidelines. Cupcakes are baked fresh every day as are our muffins and cookies. Our cakes and frostings are made from scratch just like someone would make at home. That way we are able to provide many different varieties," Brandstrader said.

For these individual desserts, the prices tend to range anywhere from \$2 to \$4. The Wedding Cake cupcake, the most popular item, is priced at \$3.50. The variety of stuffed cookies and cheesecakes cost \$4.00. "The service was excellent, and everyone was so nice there. The prices are definitely more reasonable than some of the shops in downtown Wilmette," Joshi said.

Gigi's has to provide customers with top notch service in order to compete with bakeries such as Three Tarts in Northfield.

Brandstrader said, "I think people choose our business over others because we do bake fresh everyday just like people either wish they could or had the time to bake themselves."

"I could tell they were homemade," Amy Moser, a first time customer, said. "The dumplings were so flakey, not like something made in a factory."

While the assortment of dumplings and fillings may already seem overwhelming to a newcomer, Hughbanks doesn't want to stop there. "Right now we have beef, lamb, squash and potatoes but I would like to add some more," she said.

While Hughbanks had cooked in the past, she'd only done so for her family. Cooking for the public is a completely different task.

"Well yes," she said, "you really need to know how to do it." Now, she works with a chef, who cooks all of the food served in the restaurant.

The menu, at first glance, may make a picky eater uneasy. Most people in the area have never heard of belyaji, pirojki, or samsy, let alone tasted it.

However, it's worthwhile for anyone to give it a try, especially because The Funky Monk is one of the only restaurants in the area that carries the unique cuisine.

"I've never been there before," Emily Flynn, a junior at New Trier, said, "but I definitely would consider going. I've never had food from Mongolia so it would be kind of cool to try it."

The Funky Monk offers flakey,

WHO:
The Funky Monk



WHAT:
Mongolian Cuisine

WHERE:
Evanston

Mongolian cuisine hits Evanston

by *Jessi Zook*

Mongolia, a country more than 6,500 miles away, is known for its rich, unique cuisine, which is something that Ulzii Hughbanks is trying to bring to the North Shore.

Hughbanks, owner of The Funky Monk in Evanston, had never owned a restaurant before. She had business skills and some experience with restaurants, which she learned from owning a few salons in the area and helping out with the restaurant that her family owned in Mongolia. "I used to just manage bringing products [to the table] and the accounting," she said, but owning a restaurant is completely different.

Hughbanks was faced with planning a menu and other seemingly simple tasks that proved more difficult. Even getting a lease was a challenge, Hughbanks said. "They require a lot of experience in the restaurant business and it doesn't matter what kind of business you've owned before."

Despite the difficulties, Hughbanks was determined to open her very own restaurant. She saw the need for Mongolian and Russian food on the North Shore. "Every time I wanted to find a place that, you know, makes me feel like home, I couldn't find one," she said.

Since leaving Mongolia in 2002, Hughbanks realized that she wasn't the only one who was in search for a little piece of home. "When I owned salons," she said, "around lunchtime, most of the girls from Mongolia or Russia were looking for somewhere to eat. That's when I had the idea that I should open up a Mongolian restaurant."

The restaurant itself, having opened to the public in August of 2015, is a quaint storefront on Church Street. Comfy booths line the walls, and old photographs hang overhead.

From the front door, you can see back into the kitchen, where pots and pans clang and the chef is likely flitting about.

Hughbanks hopes that The Funky Monk will eventually be known strictly for dumplings, which are their best seller. What sets them apart, she said, is that the recipes are all hers, back from Mongolia. Everything is made in the store, so it tastes homemade.

of those who try it.

While many people may never go to Mongolia, The Funky Monk has succeeded in bringing a little bit of Mongolia to Evanston. "Evanston is so unique," Hughbanks said. "People can experience different kinds of food when they come to see us."

WHO:
Frost Gelato



WHAT:
Gelato and coffee

WHERE:
Highland Park

Frost brings a new twist to frozen faves

by *Melanie Mandell and Hannah Richard*

Located on a Central Street in Highland Park is a contemporary gelato shop that gives ice cream a fresh, new twist.

As you walk into Frost Gelato, you immediately feel as though you're in a frozen oasis.

The floors and walls are a sleek white with cool blue and silver accents. The restaurant has a simple layout, with a few tables scattered about. The focal point of the restaurant is the three display cases stocked with gelato.

Instead of displaying gelato in stark steel dishes, the innovative eatery adds cute accent items to their ice cream display. Each flavor has items included in the case that help tell a

story about the flavor.

Passion fruit has assorted fruit rinds and flowers, whereas the peanut butter chocolate has Lindt chocolate truffles and full peanuts in it. These items aren't served to eat, but they certainly add to the ambiance of this modern eatery.

As for the actual gelato, the flavors are astounding. Each one perfectly matches its name.

If gelato isn't your style, Frost also offers other options, including sorbets, ice cream cakes, coffee, and a delicious, rich hot chocolate.

The raspberry tastes exactly like a fresh bowl of berries, and the dark

chocolate is just like a bar of Swiss chocolate. The best way to discover the beauty of Frost would be to visit it yourself. According to the company, its most popular flavors are dark chocolate and sea salt caramel.

Frost boasts that their gelato is not only a fun frozen treat, it's also healthier than traditional ice cream.

The company says ice cream usually has around 280 calories per serving whereas gelato has 132-180 calories per 3.5 ounce serving, and one fifth the fat of ice cream.

If gelato isn't your style, Frost also offers other options, including sorbets, ice cream cakes, coffee, and a delicious, rich hot chocolate.

Although it may be a bit of a drive for some, Frost Gelato is definitely worth the trek.