

The buzz about living gluten-free

Ottawa event offers information, products and expert advice

BY HATTIE KLOTZ, OTTAWA CITIZEN MARCH 27, 2014



Oresta Korbutiak of Oresta's Organic Skin Care Confectionery sells gluten-free beauty products.

Photograph by: Jean Levac, Ottawa Citizen

Tired of attending gluten-free events in cities other than her hometown, Samantha Maloney decided to do something about it. She found the space, dozens of exhibitors and now just needs people to show up.

Gluten-Free Utopia offers the chance to gather everyone under one roof on April 5 at Library and Archives Canada. About 25 vendors will take part in the event, which includes talks on nutrition.

"It won't be just about baked goods," says Maloney, who is allergic to wheat, gluten-intolerant and runs Bez, a gluten-free bakery.

It wasn't long ago that the food industry didn't go out of their way to cater to people with gluten issues. Now restaurateurs and grocery-store chains offer gluten-free dishes and products.

Maloney's event will include talks from a nutritionist and a naturopath, as well as showcasing products such as salsa, salad dressing, cider and cosmetics.

For exhibitor Liz Snell, who makes salsa and salad dressings in Orléans, her line of condiments is all about healthy eating. Sold under the Snell House label and available in stores across Ottawa and in Manotick, her sauces are gluten-free.

“My passion for and dedication to healthy food comes from my mom,” says Snell. “She was a single parent raising six children at a time when instant and frozen dinners were the catchwords of the day. In spite of that, she always made everything from scratch, even going so far as to make homemade TV dinners. She believed in good, balanced nutrition, and I’ve inherited that from her.”

The mantra of Strawberry Blonde Bakery, at 114B Grange Ave., is to create only things that are allergy-friendly. All products are vegan, gluten-free and nut-free. The owners, Jacqui Okum and Claire Tomchishen, met while working at Rainbow Foods and decided to pool their passion and knowledge and launched at the Ottawa Farmers’ Market in 2012. In November 2013, they opened a retail location in West Wellington, which will soon be open seven days a week.

Now, as well as supplying wholesale baked goods to other stores across Ottawa, the pair spends a lot of time creating perfect recipes that avoid gluten, dairy and nuts. “It’s not as simple as just variations on the flour,” explains Okum. “We’ve discovered secrets that include tofu in brownies, applesauce in cookies and vinegar and baking soda as an egg replacement. The reaction of the two together creates carbon dioxide, which naturally leavens batters as they bake. The taste of the vinegar is unnoticeable in the finished product. This replaces traditional methods.”

For Oresta Korbutiak, owner of Oresta Organic Skin Care Confectionery, demand for gluten-free skin care has grown exponentially in the 18 years that she has been in the business.

“I’ve seen a huge increase in customers who are celiac and others who have gluten allergies. They specifically seek us out for gluten-free makeup and facial treatments.”

Oresta’s skin-care boutiques, in New Edinburgh, the Glebe and West Wellington, stock a wide range of beauty products that are gluten-free and organic. They include Afterglow Cosmetics, Ilia Beauty, Vapour Organic Beauty, Kahina Giving Beauty and some products from the Eminence Organics line from Hungary.

For those with extreme gluten allergies, it’s a lifetime chore of looking for hidden gluten in prepared foods. Even beauty companies will use the protein as a binder in its products.

“This can be a problem for people with extreme allergies, and I do have people who have developed dermatitis due to their allergies,” says Korbutiak.

“My boutiques attract people who have many different sensitivities, and I’ve seen a huge increase in all sorts of sensitivities over the years.”

Gluten-Free Utopia

When: April 5, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St.

Info: Glutenfreeutopia.com

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