



Wafer to Success

Many of America's bakeries are family-run establishments that take pride in the community. They are a one-of-a-kind spot where locals and people passing through are welcomed to come enjoy homemade sweets made with only the best local ingredients. But how do only a select few small-town Texas businesses gain a reputation for local quality in and outside its borders?

At the Slaton Bakery, in Slaton, Texas, Chad Wilson along with his parents Sherrell and Robin Wilson, recently took a small family business and discovered a niche for a very special cookie. Made from scratch with Texas ingredients, the crunchy texture and smooth vanilla flavor of a well-known product helped this family-owned and operated bakery grow into one of "West Texas' best kept secret."

This special cookie is the Vanilla Wafer. You can purchase the cookie at any United Supermarket in West Texas and the Dallas Metroplex, as well as on the shelves at the family bakery which opened its doors in 1923.

"Vanilla wafers are one of our oldest recipes. We started out making a little bitty bowl (20 quart) of it and would be lucky if we would sell all of that in a week. Our friends told us we were idiots because they could go to the grocery store for cheaper," said Chad Wilson, CCO (Chief Cookie Officer) and 4th generation Wilson family member of the Slaton Bakery.

The wafer made its way to fame one quart at a time.

*"Whatever you are
be a good one."*

It began with a 30 quart bowl of dough every week, followed by two 30 quart bowls a week. As time went by, the Wilson family began noticing the large amounts of vanilla wafer dough they were making on a weekly basis. Soon it was an 80 quart bowl of dough then a 140 quart bowl of dough.

"It took a little while to build up to those, but we started noticing how much people liked them over the boxed brands at the store and we

just never thought about going outside the retail area of it until one of our good friends mentored us on how to take a good product and make it on a big scale,"

Wilson said, after describing how they discovered the family's old vanilla wafer recipe was a local hit.

Within a year and a half of taking a small recipe and turning it into a mass production, the Slaton Bakery vanilla wafers hit the shelves at their local supermarket, Thriftway. Soon to follow the new cookie trend was the Drug Emporium and United Supermarkets.

After only being on the shelves for six months in only 15 stores, The Slaton Bakery vanilla wafers were giving Chip's Ahoy!®, Oreo® and Nabisco's Nilla Wafers® 50 store count, a run for their money. The Slaton Bakery's cookies were top five in the Cookie and Cracker sales at United Supermarkets.

"We aren't trying to compete on price, it's the quality," Wilson said.

John Jameson, General Manager of a United Market Street location in Lubbock, Texas, explained how local product sells and how the Slaton Bakery's vanilla wafer has spoke for itself.

“One- it is a local cookie. Two- It is the best cookie we have on the shelf. Within just a few months it became our best selling cookie,” said Jameson.

“The great thing about working with Chad is that he was willing to come out, give out sample products and educate customers on a local product. It is pretty easy to sell a product that is so great.” Jameson said.

Proud to support local products and the small town of Slaton, the Bakery supports every town event that occurs, as well as T-ball teams, car shows and school projects. The bakery also donates to Mercy Manna, a branch of Lubbock’s food bank, who stops by every Wednesday to pick up the leftover products, averaging approximately 200 pounds of sweets per week.

“We want to bring notoriety to Slaton and see what else we have to offer here. Maybe our vanilla wafers are just one way to get them here,” Wilson said.

The bakery is also a member of GO TEXAN, a marketing initiative sponsored by the Texas Department of Agriculture that encourages consumers to purchase Texas-made products. At the bakery, apart from the sweet smells of fresh donuts, cookies and pastries, local products from other Slaton food celebrities such as honey from local bee keepers and salsa from Kylito’s Salsa Company can be found.

One can also purchase a cook book that binds together the local’s stories, memories and Slaton’s favorite recipes that was created to celebrate the bakery’s 60th Anniversary. The first 66 pages of the book tell stories that underlie the smiles of customers and the frosting coated aprons of the employees, add a sprinkle of sugar to the bakeries reminiscences.

“Most of them aren’t just friends, but family. We have a lot of regulars that are in here every day. You realize how much you rely on them. They are more than just a number or ringing up the cash register. We know them on a first name basis and

even know their grandparents,” Wilson said.

“A grandfather would bring his granddaughter in every Saturday morning because his granddad did that with him.”

The Wilson family laughs and makes it clear that their employees make up their future retirement fund.

“We have a joke around here that when you start working here, we weigh you in then when you leave, we weigh you out and you pay us the difference,” said Sherrill Wilson, bakery owner and father of Chad Wilson.

The quote, “Whatever you are, be a good one,” hand painted on the old church turned cookie factory wall, is just one of many ways to describe the atmosphere the Wilson family has in the kitchen.

West Texas is home to the six generations of Wilson’s who kept the corner bakery up and running through the Great Depression, two World Wars and numerous economic downturns. Historical recognition,

old pictures, stories and numerous awards line the walls of the bakery, and tell the story behind the success of this family.

“Did Chad tell you the story about...” is just the start of a story that has is kneaded its own way into the old recipes that have contributed to the traditional dough and the rising of the Slaton Bakery. 

