

Acme and Appalachian Granny's Bakery Find a Time-Share Recipe for Success

by Jon Dunn

In Columbus, it takes some creative thinking for local eateries to attract new customers and thrive during these tough economic times. After a chance meeting at a local Moose Lodge, Acme Hotdog & Sausage Company owner Mark Weilbacher and Appalachian Granny's Bakery owner Angie Moore are merging their unique food concepts in a “dogs by day, bakery by night” idea under Acme's roof in Minerva Park to share customers and operating expenses. By featuring the combined menu in the Acme storefront, Columbus diners can now set their sights on a new, innovative destination eatery in a convenient location on the North side of the city. The new menu is set to debut on November 18th, just in time for the holidays.

Located at 4989 Cleveland Avenue, the Acme Hotdog & Sausage Company carries a reputation for Columbus' best hot dogs served with creative flair in a family diner setting. Mark, who brought the Acme concept to life five years ago, thinks combining the two businesses under one roof makes good sense on many levels. “During these tough times, we're both looking for more 'touch points' in each of our businesses,” he explains, adding “by working together, we can combine experience and concepts, so everything we do will complement each other. And besides, two A's are better than one!”

The fledgling partnership mixes the unique skills, personalities and experiences of the two entrepreneurs into a new recipe. Angie brings a rare talent of making her creativity work within the structure of a large corporate-run kitchen. But her skilled chef's abilities were honed as a bakery worker and apprentice, not from a college or specialty school. Starting in an entry-level position at the Big Bear Store's bakery, she worked her way up in the kitchen, then moved to a position with Sodexo Services at Nationwide Insurance for nearly 15 years, where her training led her to a lead bakery position filled with tremendously challenging, yet exciting demands.

Years of mentoring under top chefs instilled in Angie the rules that she now breaks on a regular basis with her recipes. “My only real competition is my own creativity,” she offers, adding “I wanted to take the traditional Americana recipes and tweak them my own way.”

But when Nationwide put the account up for bid this summer, the contract with Sodexo was lost and Angie found herself out of the corporate kitchen. “I was working from home, doing some private work for clients that followed from Nationwide,” Angie explains, “but the business was outgrowing my space, and I wanted a more formal position in the market. That meant finding a new, bigger space so I could increase my capacity.” She's very eager to get her products onto a larger stage and into the hands of her waiting customers. “Since I left there, my clients have been looking for me.”

Angie started networking, looking for opportunities when one presented itself in a non-professional environment. Angie is currently the Senior Regent at the Worthington Moose Lodge, Chapter #1427 on Schrock Road. Mark's also a Moose, and he drops by Lodge #1427, which is located near Acme. “I had already been developing my concept for the bakery and happened to strike up a conversation with Mark,” Angie says, adding “I explained that I needed a space for what I wanted to do and it went from there. I felt like we could work together.” Further discussions took place about her requirements and how they could manage the kitchen and the schedules.

The kitchen at Acme is enough to meet her capacity needs and features two large convection ovens and plenty of space to work. And since most commercial bakeries operate overnight, Angie's late shift won't interfere with Acme's daytime hours.

“After we (Acme) close for the day at 8pm, the restaurant sort of becomes wasted real estate,” offers Mark. “This way we’re both going to really utilize everything we have, with no impact on each others schedule.” In a side benefit, Acme is also very conveniently located for both of them: Mark lives down Cleveland Avenue a little bit and Angie lives close by off of Karl Road. “It’s a very short commute,” she says, smiling.

The partnership isn’t necessarily an opposites-attract situation, as both are well-grounded business people, with common goals for a successful opportunity. Mark is very outgoing, confident and shoot-from-the-hip, while Angie is little quieter and somewhat reluctant to blow her own horn, Mark prods her into offering more information and expand on her answers. But Angie’s confidence and drive are clearly apparent as she talks about her work.

Mark’s also done time in the restaurant business, and that time behind the counter is backed with years of corporate banking and managing large non-profit organizations, then tempered by the rigors of running a small restaurant reality. From creating the initial concept and development cycle, to the prep work and cooking, Mark has sweated every detail and is completely hands-on in every aspect of Acme.

Angie and Mark share the common vision of creating a successful catering business for themselves. Not only can the menus be catered separately, (Acme can do tailgates and Angie makes birthday and wedding cakes) they’ll also complement each other. “It’s nice that we both do different, unique and creative menus for catering,” says Angie. Mark adds that “this combination is a great concept, because we can do a lot of custom things for people using our existing products.”

The Acme menu is like filling a picnic basket on a cross-country road trip: It starts out in Boston (the Boston Bean Dog) then down to NY (the Coney Dog) to Chicago (the Chicago Style) and Texas (the Border Dog), before heading to the West coast (the Nacho Dog), and beyond (the Big Kahuna). But, as with any trip, there are some intriguing detours. Like Angie, Mark is also fond of tweaking traditional recipes. One of his most popular (and deadly) creations is the Swanky Franky, a deep-fried beef hotdog wrapped with bacon & cheese, but the strangest is the Meatball Lollipop, which is exactly what the name suggests. “I’m really proud of that one,” says Mark with a grin.

Angie’s trip takes more of a Southern track, which she admits to being “heavy on the pies,” such as her apple-jalapeno, the temptingly spicy filling nestled in a cheddar-cornmeal crust, or a luscious sweet potato pie. “I make everything from peach cobbler, red velvet cake, Italian cream cake, to whoopie pies,” she offers. But she’s probably most excited to bring her legendary no-bake cookies back to eager customers. “I was famous at Nationwide for my no-bake cookies,” she says, proudly. “Everyone there’s been in mourning about the no-bake cookies. They’re my signature item, so I want everyone to know they’re available again.”

With their American Eclectic menu in hand, Angie and Mark are anxious to put the operation on Cleveland Avenue into full swing. They’ve made an Appalachian Granny’s sign to ride under the Acme banner in front of the shop and Mark’s adjusting the serving area to house a pie case and additional shelves for the baked goods. Their excitement is contagious, making their easy rapport only slightly surprising, for them having met just a short time ago.

“I think we’re going to offer top notch products in a nice, upscale setting, and that’ll definitely make us a destination eatery,” Mark says confidently. Angie quickly agrees. “You’re right,” she says, “It’s unique. We don’t copy anyone else’s work, we’re completely different. That’s what we both want to be and what

people what to experience: something different.”

As the date approaches, Angie's ready to fire up those ovens and get to work at what she loves to do: bake something special. She has a vision in her mind for every morning after a night of conjuring her incredible confections from humble ingredients. “I can't wait to see the dining room tables topped with all sorts of pies, cakes and other goodies cooling off after coming out fresh from the oven,” she says with an ear-to-ear grin. “Don't you think that will be wonderful?”

You can visit the Acme Hotdog & Sausage Company at 4989 Cleveland Avenue every day from 11am to 8pm, except Sundays, and learn more about their menu at www.acmehdsc.com. Call Acme at 614-891-ACME. Angie's Appalachian Granny's Bakery items will be available for carry out at Acme, and you can order them either at the store or at www.appgranny.com. You can contact them at 614-732-2803.

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