

Sweet treats: Teen entrepreneur shares chocolates in pop-up shop

Julia Hubert - 12:32 pm



Sharon Henderson, 16, of Woodmere, is a vegetarian. Strawberries are her favorite fruit, and chocolate nears her all-time favorite. Henderson is the founder, producer and sole proprietor of Bark's Chocolates, a pop-up shop on E. 12th St. in Chagrin on Thursday at the conclusion of the celebration of Bark's Chocolates, an event for her business holiday at the park.

Sharon Henderson is a real go-getter, according to her marketing teacher Lisa Simon. Sharon started a business, Bark's Chocolates, at age 17 to offer fresh and easy snacks to her community. One year later, Sharon is preparing for a pop-up shop at E. 12th St. Chagrin Boulevard before tomorrow's Day, the biggest holiday of the year for her business.

Sharon, 16, of Woodmere is a vegetarian. Strawberries are her favorite fruit, and chocolate nears her all-time favorite. She is the only student in her class to start a business. Ms. Simon said of her classes at the Business Academy, housed within the Village of Chagrin City, Great Districts.

"It has made me happy," Sharon said on Monday. "When they say it's good, it makes my heart warm."

Ms. Simon said Sharon made significant strides in the business academy course, which are housed at the Business Center located in the building, just off the corner intersection of E. 12th St. Sharon is also a senior at Chagrin High School, where she is a cheerleader for the football and basketball teams.

Ms. Simon teaches four courses in the business academy, including introduction to business, business management, entrepreneurship and marketing, which are each an semester long. She said students learn about how to create business and marketing plans, including how to pitch their product or service. Teachers districts are represented at the business academy, Ms. Simon said, and the only accepts one applicant from the Chagrin schools.

"Sharon has been really awesome in getting her business out there. She has gone to several farmers markets," which Ms. Simon said was important through University of Chagrin's training. Valley. "She also did some on her own throughout Cleveland in the summer and last year. She did pop up shops. Starting a business is not required. This was her giving the extra mile."

Sharon sells chocolate covered strawberries, cream, pineapples, grapes and pretzels. She offers milk, dark and white chocolate. There are packages available for purchase as well as the option for custom orders, she said. The decorations correspond to the season or holiday, such as red and pink for Valentine's Day and going green for Mother's Day and Easter, the most popular holiday for her business.

Although Sharon said she did not have extensive experience with cooking or baking, the recipe for making the mix was her first business. She described the packaging of Bark's Chocolates as "an experiment." She wanted nothing to be bland and fairly, but used some fresh ideas to get her range and find more customers.

"I wanted to increase the range and feedback really helped with that," Sharon said. "With social media and marketing, I'm excited to go long."

Sharon's Instagram handle is @barkchocolates and her Facebook page is called Bark's Chocolates. Customers fill out a Google form to place their order.

Ms. Simon said the students learn a variety of skills in their business courses at the academy, including teamwork, leadership, communication, time management, project management and planning. She also teaches students to be philanthropic by participating in fundraisers for United Way and other nonprofits.

"I help them build resilience," Ms. Simon said. "They're going to be told 'no' or 'it's not going to work' or 'you're doing it wrong.' They need to be able to bounce back and then they find the courage and strength."

Sharon said patience is the most important trait as a young entrepreneur. It is also important to know your market, she said. Valentine's Day is one of her favorite holidays to sell her products.

"People buy it for themselves, their mom and sister, it's mostly family based and people enjoy it," Sharon said. "Valentine's Day isn't just about couples, it's about families and who all you love."

Her family helps Sharon succeed with her business. Her Sharon taught relatives how to make her treats. They help her with the products and deliver them when Sharon is busy with school and her weekly at Olive Garden and Lifetime Fitness. Sharon said she searches for the best fresh strawberries, often found at Miles Farmers Market in Solon.

By supporting her business, Sharon said customers get a quality product "without breaking the bank." A pair of 12 chocolate covered strawberries is \$25 and 24 strawberries cost \$35.

Bark's Chocolates has also garnered attention from community stakeholders. Strawberry held its groundbreaking in November at E. 12th St. in Chagrin. Sharon said Mayor Ben Hubert said "Christine having, was president of Cleveland, opened an account for her. The mayor gave Sharon a personal donation of \$100 at the bank's groundbreaking. Mayor Hubert's action led to another donation from the city to help her business, said Sharon.

Ms. Hubert is the CEO of H&B Foods and a friend of Sharon's father. Sharon's work schedule for her business, Ms. Hubert attended the groundbreaking, he was inspired by the mayor's donation to Sharon, so Ms. Hubert pledged a \$100 donation as well. Stark Enterprises also made a \$200 donation to Bark's Chocolates.

"I love to see the glaze in young folk's eyes when they start their business," he said. "I started when I was young, too. I did odd jobs like mowing lawns and cutting grass. Every entrepreneur has to start somewhere and this is the start."

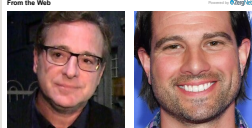
Ms. Hubert also offered mentoring and advice to Sharon. He later volunteered in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and mentors young entrepreneurs through the President's Council, a local organization for African American business owners. Their goal is to have about 15 businesses, Ms. Hubert said, but its associated number of companies includes several hundred businesses of all sizes.

Sharon's pop-up shop will be held at E. 12th St. in Chagrin on Wednesday from Feb. 12-13 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Feb. 14 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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Julia Hubert
Julia Hubert is a reporter for the Chagrin Valley Times since August of 2018 and covers Gates Mills, Hunting Creek, Woodmere, Chagrin, Pepper Pike and Woodmore. She graduated from John Carroll University with a journalism degree in 2018.

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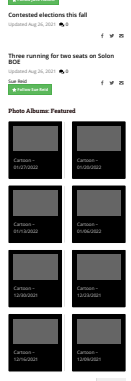
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