



JUSTIN WAN, JOURNAL STAR

Katey Stukenholtz, an assistant chocolatier at Lulubee Artisanal Chocolates, coats a pitch of salt on milk chocolate sea salt caramel truffles.

A TASTY TRIBUTE

Passport stop features chocolatier that sells memorable bonbons

LAUREN PENINGTON
Lincoln Journal Star

For chocolatier Gaylene Steinbach, Christmas will always remind her of a cold room, a marble slab and the smell of chocolate.

Every year throughout Steinbach's childhood, her mother transformed an empty guest room into a chocolate production space.

Steinbach watched as her mom carefully handcrafted bonbons and topped the treats with curative letters to mark the filling — 'A' for almond, 'C' for coconut, 'L' for lemon.

"I grew up with my mom doing that in our house," she said. "I was familiar with it, I was surrounded by it, but the bug didn't hit me until much later when my mom sent me some of her chocolates for a birthday."

Decades after watching her mother for the first time, Steinbach said the taste blew her away, inspiring her to delve deep into the craft and eventually start her own business.

"It took me back home and it piqued my interest," she said. "I was so interested in how someone could create such indulgent tastes within this tiny morsel and

If You Go

Lulubee Artisanal Chocolates
5720 Hidcote Dr Suite 101, Lincoln
Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Monday through Saturday

so I just began reading everything I could on making chocolates and started to experiment. Pretty soon, my family and friends were encouraging me to make this into a business."

Just as her mother shared the tradition with her, Steinbach kept her children close throughout the process, going so far as to name her emerging business after them.

A combination of their nicknames — Lulu and Bee — merged together to create the face of Steinbach's chocolatiering journey: Lulubee.

Today, Lulubee Artisanal Chocolates is one of 70 stops in the Nebraska Passport program — an annual tourism promotion effort that encourages travelers to visit a variety of museums, parks, restaurants, wineries, retail stores and more across the state.

The 2023 Nebraska Passport program runs from May 1 through Sept. 30, and for the next five months we'll have a weekly feature highlighting stops along the passport.



COURTESY PHOTO

Gaylene Steinbach owns Lulubee Artisanal Chocolates, which is best known for its chocolate bonbons and flavor experimentations.

Participants can qualify for prizes based on how many locations they visit during the program, collecting physical or digital stamps at each stop.

Steinbach's business started production out of a coffee shop kitchen in the North Bottoms in 2014, but demand quickly outgrew the space's capacity.

In November of 2020,

Steinbach opened a brick-and-mortar store of her own in

Please see **LULUBEE**, Page A2

LOOK: To watch how Lulubee's makes its chocolates, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

Lulubee

From A1

Lincoln's Village Gardens. She said it allowed her to increase production and, for the first time, gave her a retail space.

Before, Steinbach did business solely through her online store, event outreach and wholesale customers.

Now that the shop has foot traffic and people wandering in the front door, she said the dynamic has changed completely.

"I could talk about chocolate for days and days," she said. "There's always something new, there are flavors that we have yet to explore, endless combinations of flavor and texture differences. To me, it's just never ending possibilities and it excites me, it motivates me."

While the store is stocked with truffles, caramel, turtles, toffee and artisan chocolate bars, Steinbach said if customers were going to walk away with one item, it'd have to be their gourmet bonbons.

Some of Steinbach's most memorable bonbons include a mint flavor, her favorite piece her mom made when she was a kid; a root beer flavor, linked to memories of summer and childhood; and a pina co-



JUSTIN WAN PHOTOS, JOURNAL STAR

Becky Nelson, an assistant chocolatier at Lulubee Artisanal Chocolates, coats a layer of dark chocolate on to the molds.

lada flavor, stemming from travel and living abroad.

"I talk about them being rooted in the past, but these are indulgences, these are gifts to be shared," Steinbach said. "The flavors are rooted in my past experiences, that I want to share with the customers. ... I don't think you can ever go wrong with the gift of chocolate."

Reach the writer at 402-473-2657 or lpenington@journalstar.com. On Twitter @laurenpenington



Becky Nelson, an assistant chocolatier at Lulubee Artisanal Chocolates, drops hazelnuts into chocolate molds.