



The Talented Cookie Company owner Wendy Newman shows off one of the bakery's cupcakes of the day, a Tiramisu cupcake. Wendy opened The Talented Cookie Company in 2013 after her online custom cookie business took off and she needed a bigger space to work in.



Tucked away on a quiet street in historic High Springs sits the holy grail of coffee shops. From the outside, The Talented Cookie Company looks like an everyday small-town bakery/coffee-shop combo, complete with rustic charm and a homey feel. However, after taking one look at the menu and the endless array of sweets lining the counter, visitors will realize that this is no ordinary eatery, but a destination for caffeine and sweets fanatics.

When walking into The Talented Cookie Company, you're immediately met with the smell of freshly-ground coffee beans and cookies straight out of the oven. The wooden countertops are lined with desserts made from scratch, ranging from vegan brownies to chocolate-covered Oreos topped with sprinkles. The chalkboard menu is full of items you won't find at a Starbucks. From lavender lattes to birthday cake iced tea, the options are endless. This is your neighborhood coffee shop turned up a dozen notches.

Unique Sweets

The Talented Cookie Company's menu can easily be described as fun and unique. Their coffee menu is made up of your staple lattes, cappuccinos and espressos, among other options. However, you can personalize your drinks with one of The Talented Cookie's 14 coffee syrups. From classic flavors like vanilla and hazelnut to the more unique lavender, red velvet and banana, you can give any drink an extra shot of flavor.

Owner Wendy Newman is known for adding an extra sprinkle of fun to all of her menu items, turning even plain milk into a party in a glass.

"I can't leave anything plain," Newman said. "Our 'Sprinkle Milk' is our version of milk. We do regular, strawberry or chocolate and we do whipped cream and sprinkles on top so it's really fun."

While living up to its name, The Talented Cookie Company offers homemade baked goods made by Wendy and her talented staff. The bakery offers muffins, cupcakes, cookies, homemade granola bars and other decadent sweets and treats, and their specials change daily.

When it comes to designing the menu, Newman decides what to whip up based on her customers' feedback. A self-taught baker, she has learned to adapt her menu and advance her skills though trying out new recipes for The Talented Cookie Company.

"I like to listen to what people want," Newman said. "This is a big community for vegan and vegetarian-type things. When I started baking I had no clue what that even



The Talented Cookie Company

Story and Photos by KAYLA LOKEINSKY



The Talented Cookie Company is located at 23519 N Main St. in High Springs. This coffee shop and bakery sells different types of coffee drinks, teas and baked goods. They also offer a variety of syrup flavors for their coffee and tea drinks, including: hazelnut, coconut, lavender, caramel, raspberry, banana, peppermint, vanilla, salty jack, butter pecan, red velvet, mocha, which chocolate and cinnamon bun. You can buy some of their syrups in jars and use them at home.



was, how to bake like that, so it's been a lot of trial and error and kind of making it work."

Now all of The Talented Cookie Company's muffins and cupcake bases are vegan. While they typically use buttercream icing on their cupcakes, they also make vegan or gluten-free vegan icing. Newman always makes sure that there are a few gluten-free items and vegan items on the menu, but there is one substitution that she refuses to make.

"Never sugar-free," Newman said with a laugh. "We just don't believe in it."

Humble Beginning

Newman opened The Talented Cookie Company in October 2013 after her online custom cookie business began booming. A former professional hair stylist, Newman owned two salons in Lake City at different times before she retired from doing hair in order to be a stay-at-home mom. In 2011, she opened an Etsy store selling custom sugar cookies, and her cookies became so popular that her business outgrew her home kitchen.

"It just grew so fast and I was doing so many cookies from my house and shipping them out all over the United States," Newman said. "I basically needed more of a commercial kitchen to bake out of and produce that many cookies that I was doing. We decided to open the small storefront to do that mainly but then we started the small coffee and just a few bakery items on the counter and from there it just grew like crazy."

Although she had been baking for years, Newman never thought she would open her own bakery. What started out as a hobby



turned into a full-fledged business when her cookies took the online dessert world by storm.

"I finally got to a point with my online business where I was honestly probably working 70 hours a week doing nothing but cookies," Newman said. "I had so many orders going out. I said I'm either going to have to just stop or I'm going to have to open a bakery because I can't do it from home anymore."

Newman continued to sell cookies through her Etsy store until The Talented Cookie Company moved to its larger, current location in March 2015. While she still does custom cookies for local clients, she mostly sells them out of her storefront. And while she never set out to own her own bakery/coffee shop, she is happy she has started a business that allows her to play in the kitchen and have fun with her work.

"I'm glad I did it," Newman said. "It's a lot of work, a lot of hours. I'm here more than I'm at home. But as long as I can do it in fun, it's good."

That Homestyle Feel

What sets The Talented Cookie Company apart from chain coffee shops is the authenticity of their drinks and baked goods.

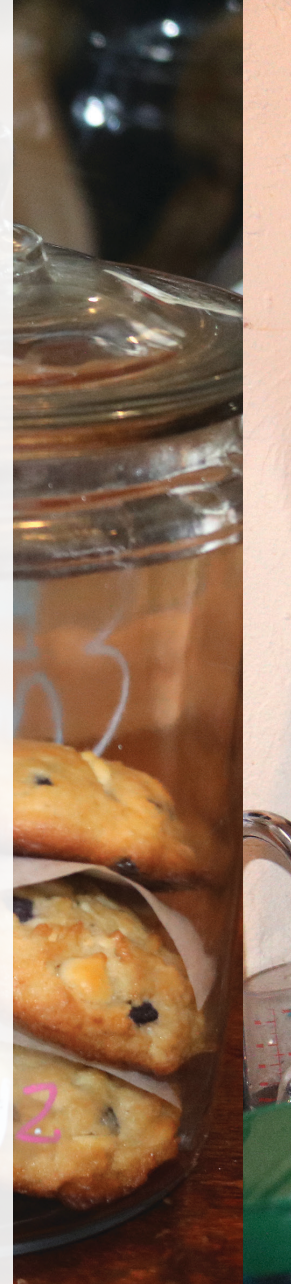
"Everything's homemade and everything's fun," Newman said. "It's just something different from most places. Everything's good, wholesome ingredients. No added preservatives or anything like that. It's just butter, sugar, flour."

The Talented Cookie has an atmosphere that is as enticing as its homemade cinnamon rolls. With tables and chairs throughout the store, it's a great place to spend the day chatting over tea or working on your computer. There are hammocks in the back and a patio with covered tables, as well as lawn games like corn hole and Jenga, the kind of place that invites you to stay a while.

"We try to keep more of that homestyle feel," Newman said. "We want people to come in and feel relaxed and comfortable and know that they can chill all day if they need to."

With their business steadily increasing, The Talented Cookie Company is planning to expand their storefront. They are currently sharing the building with an antique store, where customers can browse while sipping on their coffee or tea. However, they will be taking over that part of the building and adding new seating and new retail items throughout, as well as additional space for parties and cookie-decorating classes that Newman teaches.

As The Talented Cookie Company continues to grow, things are bound to get sweeter from here.



Some of The Talented Cookie Company's most popular baked items include their Butter Pecan Blondies (left) and Coconut Chewy Bars



The Talented Cookie Company owner Wendy Newman whips up a latte at her bakery/coffee shop. The Talented Cookie serves up a variety of coffees, teas and other drinks in addition to baked goods.