



Photos by Derek Gee/Buffalo News

Niagara Falls High School senior Andrea Meterko makes her own chocolates at home and sells them to teachers and students at school.

Chalk it up to chocolate

Falls senior cashes in on tasty course work

By PAUL WESTMOORE
NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU

NIAGARA FALLS — For anyone looking to find a real sweet deal, Andrea Meterko's your girl.

The 17-year-old runs Andrea's Chocolates out of Niagara Falls High School and her parents' home.

She opened for business Oct. 13 as a project for her entrepreneurial business class, and the senior said she sells chocolate suckers, chocolate-covered pretzel sticks and little chocolate pieces that come in a variety of shapes.

Her specialty: peanut butter cups made from her mother's secret recipe.

"She makes delicious peanut butter cups that go down like silk," said Joseph Bellonte, a teacher on special assignment who helps direct the school district's business program.

"It's working out very well," Andrea said. "I didn't think I'd do so well."

She already has made back the money she spent on supplies to start her small business and has turned "a decent profit," about \$540.

Her candy goes fast.

"Yesterday morning, I brought 40 peanut butter cups to school and sold all of them by 11:30 a.m.," she said on a recent day.

The peanut butter cups sell for 50 cents each.

Andrea said she makes candy at home during the week and on the weekends.



Andrea Meterko pours chocolate into molds in the kitchen at home. Her specialty is peanut butter cups.

"When I started, I never thought I'd sell 100 pounds of chocolate. I've already sold 120," she said.

She charges \$1.50 a quarter pound, \$3 a half pound and \$6 a pound for chocolate pieces that, at Christmas, were shaped like Santa Claus, snowflakes, snowmen, presents and sleighs. She sells long pretzel sticks covered with chocolate for \$1 each.

Andrea said she plans to make chocolate figures for Valentine's Day, Easter and graduation, and was considering other possibilities.

She sells her candy from a display in the principal's office, where she

also has forms so people can order larger quantities.

"Our dean of students ordered a beautiful basket of wrapped pretzel sticks [for a gathering]. She gave them to her guests as they came in. She said they looked like they came from some hoity-toity professional candy maker," Bellonte said.

Andrea said her customer base is a mixture of students and school staff members.

"I have more student customers when I bring in the peanut butter cups — which I do about twice a

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week — and the chocolate suckers,” she said. “Most of my larger orders come from teachers.”

Her decision to start up a candy business was inspired by her mother, Tina.

“I got the idea from my mom. She makes chocolates. When I was little, she would do it for birthdays.

“She’d make homemade peanut butter cups with her secret recipe, and she taught me how to do it,” Andrea said. She would not reveal her mom’s secret ingredients.

Her enterprise started when she learned she would have to run a business as part of her entrepreneurial class. She felt making chocolates would be a natural, considering her background.

“Because my mom made chocolates, she knew where to

get packaging materials like the wrappings and the boxes. She had that knowledge and told me about it over the years,” Andrea said. “I’ve been learning, and now I know the suppliers and who has the best prices.”

She said she had to start her business using more inexpensive packaging. But now she is able to use her “favorite” boxes, complete with a red ribbon pictured on the outside, which gives her products an upscale look.

Students have reacted well to the business and are often disappointed when Andrea runs out of peanut butter cups.

Often, Andrea said, students approach her in school and say things like: “Did you bring any today? Did you bring any chocolates?”

She said the experience is “teaching me how to manage my time,” with school, homework, sports and chocolate-

making in the balance.

Andrea hopes to become a teacher, but said running a business someday remains a possibility.

Ranked 13th in her class, Andrea said she has been offered scholarships to Canisius College, Niagara University and LeMoyne College, and is still looking at other institutions.

As for pawning off sweets on her schoolmates, Andrea said: “Peanut butter is pretty healthy for you. I read an article that chocolate can be healthy if it’s used in moderation. It contains antioxidants.”

Also, she said, “people buy it because they get hungry. Kids will ask, ‘Where’s Terk’s cups today?’” when they need a little energy boost to get them through the rest of the school day.

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