

A Burnsville delicacy: French Nugget chocolate

DAVID PETERSON, Star Tribune

The street in Burnsville is much like many others: a twisting subdivision road with a snowmobile sitting on a trailer in one driveway, awaiting the weekend, while an RV rests at an angle in a back yard, waiting for summer.

But down this street, every once in a while, something odd happens. A shipment of 20,000 plastic triangles arrives from abroad.

Into each will be tucked an artisan chocolate called a French Nugget, created by hand in a converted garage. The home is that of a flight attendant and her Iranian immigrant husband, who met on the French Riviera and still spend much of the year there, in a home overlooking the Mediterranean.

Other than that, Fereidoon ("Fred") Golchin and his wife, Laurie, are pretty much just like the neighbors.

"It's just the two of them, so this company is their children," said Charli Mills, of Valley Natural Foods in Burnsville, which sells the product. "They have their own commercial kitchen in a garage in Burnsville. It's a secret how he makes it, but there's a lot of pressing involved."

Fred spends hours in upscale supermarkets and natural foods stores across the Twin Cities, repeating over and over that the odd-looking bits of naturally sweetened dark-chocolate-based bits of dessert on the tray before him are made "in Burnsville." It's one of the first things he always says, as reassurance that it's local, traceable, trustworthy, in an era of one tainted-food scandal after another.

His own ebullient, arm-waving charm doesn't hurt, not to mention what Mills calls "that foreign smoldering, dark-eyed look." But the tastings are also an ego trip for him, as one customer after another cries out in surprise -- not only at the nugget itself but at how peculiarly tasty it is when bit into at the same instant as sharp cheddar cheese.

"Delicious!" said Susan St. John, of St. Paul, at one such session the other day, at the corner of Selby and Dale in St. Paul. "How much is it?" She vowed to bring precisely that combination of flavors to friends at a cocktail party that weekend.



www.frenchnugget.com

Fred and Laurie met in 1984 in Nice, in the south of France. Both were in college. Laurie Curry, from Rosemount, was attending the University of Minnesota Duluth but taking part in her own self-designed junior year abroad. It is "every foreigner's dream to come to Minnesota," as Laurie dryly put it, so they landed here for at least part of each year.

Today, Fred is a home-based hair stylist with around 200 clients. "When people ask what my husband does," Laurie said, "I tell them 'he entertains women in our home while I'm away.'" She claims not to worry: "A lot of them are my co-workers, and the word would fly fast."

France is their passion. If the French Nugget label is partly for show ("I could say 'Burnsville Nuggets,'" Fred shrugs, "but for marketing purposes ...") it also reflects a sensibility they admire there. One that Laurie summarizes by saying, "When I mentioned to a French friend that our nuggets have no trans fats, she said, 'What's 'trans fats?'" It's so American!"

The nugget tastes a bit like an extremely dense brownie, except that the sweetness comes from raisins. It's based on a 400-year-old concept, the couple says, but is their

own devising -- so much so that they spent several months testing variations. ("Our neighbors ate so much chocolate!")

The first flavor debuted in November 2007; there are now two others.

"Amazing," said Ken Poeth, of Plymouth, who was offering samples of a Norwegian fish oil-based product alongside Fred's demo table in St. Paul. "I don't eat much chocolate, but I love the fact that it's natural."

Lynn Hansen, a clerk at the same market, wandered over at last to try some herself. "I see people buying it all the time," she said, "and I don't know why."

Her verdict: "Holy cow!"

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