

Entrepreneur shares recipe for success

THERE WAS nothing half-baked about Margaret Sarrasin's dream of selling flatbreads to a few gourmet shops. The breads, seasoned with rosemary grown on her apartment balcony, had impressed friends who convinced her she could wow taste buds across Toronto.

Gourmet stores

Buoyed by their enthusiasm, Sarrasin was soon selling Margaret's Artisan Flatbreads to four gourmet stores. She was getting up earlier and earlier to bake before heading off to her job as a receptionist at a downtown Toronto bank.

Convinced she had a recipe for success, Sarrasin decided to channel all her efforts into M.J.'s Fine Foods with the help of her new business partner Richard Bedford. He didn't know flatbread from garlic bread, but he had experience owning a small business that printed promotional items and he was willing to learn.

A few years later, M.J.'s Fine Foods is shipping thousands and thousands of boxes of flatbread to more than 3,000 stores across North America each week. It's located in a 13,000-sq.-ft. bakery in Concord and employs a team of 70.

"We had a product no one else was making," Sarrasin says of M.J.'s success. "It wasn't just

another cookie. It was unique looking and unique tasting and nicely packaged."

Sarrasin and Bedford were busy, but didn't have the kind of dough needed to realize their full potential.

"We had very little money. We were surviving on credit cards and a small line of credit," Sarrasin says.

"After six months, we knew we needed to expand, but the oven we needed was \$10,000."

"You have to take risks and do things financially that are not in the comfort level for most people."

—Margaret Sarrasin

They persevered and eventually got the financing they needed to expand.

"Everything has been a learning curve," Sarrasin says. "We had to figure out how to ship this product, which is fairly fragile. Each bag sits in an individual slot."

When Longo Brothers Fruit Markets approached them, Sarrasin and Bedford recognized the potential of landing their first contract with a chain store. But their flatbread was retailing for \$4.99 and Longo's wanted a

product it could sell for \$3.99.

Determined to succeed, the partners figured out how to produce a less expensive product and Sante Fe Flatbread was born. Longo's picked it up, as did other major grocers.

The partners forged ahead, entering their rosemary flatbread and new chives and garlic flatbread into the New York Fancy Food Show contest.

They walked away with the top award for outstanding baked product, a success that helped them land contracts with 17 U.S. stores.

Is there a recipe for success?

"You have to have a passion for what you are doing and really like your product," Sarrasin says. "You have to be prepared to give up a lot of your personal time ... Starting a business consumes you totally and wholly. You have to take risks and do things financially that are not in the comfort level for most people."

Strong partnership

She also credits a dedicated team of employees and a strong partnership.

"Richard is the financial person and deals with the production line. I'm in (public relations), flavour development and marketing ... It's been a terrific, terrific partnership."

—Linda White



MARGARET SARRASIN and business partner **Richard Bedford** of **M.J.'s Fine Foods** have grown their business so much that they now ship thousands and thousands of boxes of flatbread to more than 3,000 stores across North America each week.