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Gur Sweets Bakery A Gathering Place

By Leslie Leader

Columnist

Walking into the new bakery in town at 162 N. York is like walking into any old fashioned bakery and yet experiencing something slightly different as well. The idea of old and new is exactly what Rubina Hafeez, the owner of Gur Sweets intended.

"I wanted this place to be a fusion of old and new as well as East and West," she explained while sitting at one of the comfortable café tables in the front of the shop.

Take a look around and see the old tin ceiling but with several elegant crystal chandeliers hanging from it, or look at the walls and see the intricate Asian inspired sconces. Enjoy the sleek modern furnishings against a backdrop of luscious cakes, sweet rolls and other baked goods.

Hafeez, who came to the U.S. from Pakistan at age 3, was employed until 2009 as a software engineer, but her passion has always been baking.

"I have warm memories of baking with my mom and grandmother," she said, adding that she started taking classes at C.O.D. for fun several years ago and became certified as a pastry chef in 2005. Her ethnic roots combine the East and West; Asia, Britain, Europe, and America, so her mission is to combine the best of all these worlds and to tie in the best of the past with the modern design and conveniences of today.

"In European bakeries the bistro tables are much smaller," she commented while referring to the larger round table where we sat. "People gather in cafes, meet friends, and spend hours chatting."

It's her goal to make her bakery that kind of café and for that reason, she chose a location in downtown Elmhurst with lots of foot traffic, be it students, commuters, or people stopping for bread or dessert on their way home.

"I purposely looked for a location in an established, homey kind of town because it is intimate to the roots of our social community. We have WiFi here because we want to encourage people to visit, stay, and enjoy. We also serve tea, chai, and Lavazza coffee. I even wanted to put pillows on our chairs, but my family talked



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me out of it! “

“Gur” means sugar in the purest form in the Indian language, and Hafeez offers Indian treats whether sweet *jelabi* or savory samosa along with filled cupcakes with fun names like “chocolate eclipse,” “monkeys gone bananas,” or “pistachio palooza;” butter cookies, brownies, baklava, cake pops, and sweet rolls to name only part of this extensive and ever growing list.

“Engineering, my original profession is about quality,” she said, “ and I am bringing that passion for quality to my bakery. All my recipes are tested, and I continually look for the best of the best.”

In fact, she was testing a new recipe which combines the traditional Indian flat bread, *naan* with delicately seasoned ground beef, kind of an Eastern form of pizza, when I visited and insisted that I take some home to test. I did; it was great!

Hafeez opened Gur Sweets the day after Thanksgiving, and since then she has been listening to her customers and making small changes to accommodate them and their needs. She extended her hours, for example, and added freshly baked bread to the growing list of items she offers. She also has plans to offer special discounts to students and seniors and wants to host birthday parties in the form of cake decorating, fondues, and high teas.

“We are always in a rush these days,” she said. “I want my bakery to be more than quality pastries. I hope it will become a sort of informal educational center, a place to learn about another culture, engage in the art of conversation, develop good manners, and be a place to linger, indulge a little, and spend some quality time.”

Send comments and ideas to lesliej305@att.net.

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