

Chocolatier Heidi Ash wants to make you smile

To hear 185Chocolat's Heidi Ash talk about her trade, you'd swear she's the granddaughter of Henri Nestlé or something.

By: **Matthew R. Perrine**, Budgeteer News



Local chocolatier Heidi Ash "caught" admiring some of her 185Chocolat creations. Matthew R. Perrine/Budgeteer News



A closer look at 185Chocolat's line of edibles. Matthew R. Perrine/Budgeteer News

To hear Heidi Ash talk about her trade, you'd swear she's the granddaughter of Henri Nestlé or something.

"I *dream* in chocolate. I do, I actually dream in chocolate," the native Duluthian said. "... I've always been really passionate about chocolate. I love everything about it: the beauty of it, the taste of it — it makes people happy.

"It's just following a dream."

The dream she is referring to is 185Chocolat, the company she started last April after a heart transplant at the world-famous Mayo Clinic gave her a new lease on life.

"I was the 185th heart-transplant recipient, so I thought it was such a joyous occasion that I would name my company after it," Ash explained. "Because my heart transplant was a celebration of life and chocolates are, I believe, a celebration when you eat them — at least

mine should be a celebration when you eat them — I just thought it was the best way I could think of to celebrate it.”

Although she has a master’s degree in counseling psychology, she said she was just drawn to sweets.

“I started the way a lot of people do, making hand-rolled and hand-dipped truffles,” Ash said. “From there I went to molding, because I think they’re just so more exquisite. And I love hand-painting them (with edible sparkle powder).”

Unlike her time at graduate school, chocolate — statements like “I love working with the finest ingredients I can possibly get” notwithstanding — is a comparative bargain.

“I taught myself. I didn’t take classes; I didn’t intern with anyone,” Ash said. “My father always made chocolate and candy and fudge, and my mother, too, is an excellent cook — even though she denies it. And I just like playing with food, especially because I had a fondness for sweets after the transplant.

“I don’t think one has anything to do with another; it was probably more the medication. [Laughs]”

The chocolatier hasn’t totally abandoned her schooling, however.

“I find I use psychology, but differently ... now I just make people happy because they’re so excited to see me all the time,” she said with a smile. “‘Do you have chocolate?’ ‘Do you have chocolate?’ [Laughs] Even if it’s the middle of summer and I’m wearing a sundress, ‘Do you have chocolate?’”

Ash seems to feed on the smiles her creations bring to people’s faces, but you’ll probably never hear “The chocolate lady has entered the building” at big events anytime soon.

“I like doing smaller functions than Death by Chocolate,” she admitted. “I like to talk to people one on one, because the business is so personal to me.”

Keeping 185Chocolat close to her heart (so to speak) goes two ways: A portion of the business’ proceeds benefit the Charity Transplant Fund, which helps individuals with non-medical costs such as housing and food.

“For example, I was in Rochester for 111 days in 2000 for my transplant — well, you have to eat, you have to live,” Ash explained. “I want to give more. There’s so much out there to give to, you do what you can. It’s hard, sometimes, as a small business.”

Though 185chocolat is still in its infancy, Ash humored us and looked into the proverbial crystal ball.

"At this point, I have no dreams of opening a store, because I just don't see myself being able to be the person making the chocolate and fronting the store," she said, mentioning that her products are available at Whole Foods, Angela's Bella Flora on First Street and on her Web site. "... At this point, I'm much more into creating this and other products, expanding out into making chocolate cookies."

Ash mentioned a few other products she's working on, but, like Willy Wonka's best creations, they shall remain shrouded in mystery until they're ready for the prime time.

NEWS TO USE

For more information about Heidi Ash's confectionary creations, visit www.185chocolat.com. Also be sure to check out Budgeteer reporter Matt Suoja's food blog, www.areavoices.com/moolah/?blog=43323, where he's reviewed some of the 185Chocolat creations.