



Sherry Bondroff: "It gives me something to do, and it makes me happy seeing others smiling and enjoying my cookies. I really don't need more than that." (Provided photo by Annie Mondell-Richard)

Sweet Gesture

All hail Sherry Bondroff, better known by appreciative Pikesville residents as 'The Cookie Lady.'

By Caryn R. Sagal

While "Sesame Street" has a particular resident who's infamous for devouring cookies, Pikesville has one who simply delights in baking them for others and bringing joy to the world.

Sherry Bondroff, aka "The Cookie Lady," spends up to 15 hours a week creating batch after batch of the tasty treats from scratch.

The 77-year-old mother of two and grandmother of five consistently bakes cookies such as "Baltimore Berger," "Chocolate Crackle," "Ghirardelli Chocolate Chip" and blueberry and cherry, along with zucchini blueberry and *mandel* breads.

On most Monday evenings, Bondroff packs up nearly 200 cookies — plus a large bag of Mandel bread — and heads

to dinner at Jilly's Bar & Grill in Pikesville. After giving staff first dibs, she places her baked goods at the bar counter for customers to sample. Jilly's even provides take-out containers.

"I love Jilly's and have been dining there forever," Bondroff says. "The staff is incredible, and I love their food."

"To thank those who waited on me, I started bringing my cookies a couple years ago," she says. "They liked it, so I kept bringing more and more for everyone there to enjoy. I never want to run out."

That gesture continues to draw rave reviews. "The whole place lights up when she comes in, and we look forward to seeing her every week," says Jilly's waiter Taavon Scott.

Manager Kristy Waesche calls Bondroff "an amazing lady and humble person who brightens our day. Everyone loves her cookies. We always offer her money, but she won't accept. There are not many people like her."

Pikesville resident Annie Mondell-Richard first met Bondroff a few months ago while celebrating her birthday at Jilly's with her husband.

"While waiting for our food, I watched her spread out lots of cookies and breads along the bar," she says. "As people approached her, she helped them create a mix of cookies to go. Curious, I walked over and asked if this was a fundraiser. Nope, she just enjoys doing it. It was the nicest thing I've witnessed in a long time. It really made people happy, and certainly made me happy. The cookies were delicious, too!"

After leaving Jilly's, Bondroff brings the remaining goodies to Tropicool Italian Ice on Falls Road, noting, "The kids are so excited when they see me arrive."

On Wednesdays (and some Tuesdays as well), she bakes for the staff at The Gourmet Girls, where she has lunch on Thursdays.

"The Gourmet Girls love Sherry," says co-owner Marcy Bayne. "She has such a generous and kind spirit, bringing smiles wherever she goes. She is a blessing to the community."

Bondroff also makes smaller batches of cookies for her Friday and Saturday dinner companions, and always tries to have a full supply of cookies available for staff and tenants in her apartment building.

Her penchant for baking began in 1966 after marrying her high school sweetheart, Ron Bondroff. A neighbor showed her how to measure ingredients and demonstrated various culinary techniques.

Ever since, she has followed recipes in cookbooks and (more recently) on Facebook for year-round treats and holiday classics, including Rosh Hashanah apple cake and Passover sponge cake.

Baking became a full-time hobby for Bondroff after her husband passed away in October of 2022.

"It gives me something to do, and it makes me happy seeing others smiling and enjoying my cookies," she says. "I really don't need more than that."

Bondroff says her son, Daniel, and daughter, Beth, fully approve of her baking hobby.

"Because I'm happy, they're happy," Bondroff says. "In fact, Daniel orders 32-ounce bottles of bourbon vanilla extract for me, and they last a long time."

Ironically, Bondroff can't distinguish on her own if she achieves the right flavors because she lost her sense of taste and smell several years ago. She pays strict attention to her oven timer and relies on toothpick-testing to determine if everything is fully cooked.

When she's not preparing baked goods, Bondroff makes microwaveable rice pillows that warm cold feet and soothe body aches.

"Some of the pillows have Orioles or Ravens covers. I sell them at Gourmet Girls for \$20 and they always have some in stock," she says. "I also bring them with me to Jilly's and sell some there, too. But when people want to give me cash for my cookies, I don't want it!"

When asked how long she will keep up her intense baking schedule, Bondroff says, "I'll do it until I can't."

Forced to take a hiatus following knee replacement surgery in August, she says she "really missed baking and [is] thrilled to be back."

That's a sentiment echoed by the various recipients of her confections. ❶

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based public relations consultant and freelance writer.



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