

Aspen sojourner

SUMMER 2008

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS IN ASPEN AND THE ROARING FORK VALLEY

SUCCESS STORY

A SLICE OF PARADISE

THE SWEET STORY OF ASPEN'S CORNER BAKERY



Paradise Bakery owners (l to r) Dan Patterson, Laurie Danks, Mark Patterson and Carter Holmes at the Aspen landmark.

On a Sunday evening, cyclists, tourists and schoolgirls on scooters sit in front of Aspen's Paradise Bakery & Café and break into impromptu conversation over ice cream. Inside, another dozen queue past a smorgasbord of cookies and muffins: a scene that repeats itself over and over again, whether après ski or accompanied by summertime music school students.

"We're not just selling cookies. We're trying to sell good times," says Dan Patterson, the company's president and CEO. That recipe has made Paradise as addictive as its sumptuous treats.

Aspenites think of Paradise as the old-fashioned corner bakery sandwiched between swanky boutiques. But that's just, well, the muffin top of a large—and growing—company. Paradise has 40 company-owned and franchise shops, from Boston to Snowmass Village to Phoenix. Over the next four years, it's looking to double. That's not as fast as some competitors, but it's a big jump from the single Southern California shop opened 29 years ago.

"We're determined to grow at a pace where we can maintain our culture," Patterson says. "We're not financially driven; we're people driven, and the finances come from that."

Patterson, his brother Mark and partner Carter Holmes joined financier Bob Duggan to launch the Long Beach cookie shop in 1976. Patterson, a professional volleyball player fresh from the U.S. Olympic Team, was looking for a business venture with the same intensity, and the cookie industry was just heating up. He had restaurant experience. Mark, working at the Aspen Chart House, did, too. Holmes brought design experience. Duggan, business savvy.

As cookie competition grew, they added soups and sandwiches, and soon, they were adding stores. Dallas. Northern California. Then, in 1981, Dan Patterson was getting married in Aspen when he spied a "for rent" sign at the corner gas station and ice cream shop where the Popcorn Wagon was parked.

"We called the landlord and made a deal in about an hour," Patterson says.

"That's one of the best decisions I've made." They opened what would become an Aspen landmark but the chain's most unusual store: the smallest, and the only one deeper into sweets than sandwiches.

In 1987, the Chart House chain bought Paradise, then sold it a decade later to coffee purveyor Java Centrale, which went bankrupt after just two years. Holmes and the Pattersons still ran about 20 franchises and bought the company out of bankruptcy, closing foundering stores and building up the rest.

"We had a lot at stake," said Mark Patterson, an executive vice president. "If you've got that much going and the parent company changes direction, it made sense to get control of it back."

A little store selling just three kinds of cookies and three types of muffins has grown into today's \$40 million company headquartered in Aspen, with about 1,200 employees and over 200 products. That's not as big as some, Mark Patterson says, but Paradise is growing carefully. "Our niche is to be the best at what we do," he says. "Not the biggest." ■