



These cookies you find in grocery stores are from East Dallas resident Paul Wackym. / **Paul Wackym**

12 Years in, Paul Wackym Is Still Baking Sweet Treats for Dallas

ALEX GONZALEZ | AUGUST 5, 2020 | 4:00AM

Sweet treats from **Wackym's Kitchen** are seemingly everywhere, including the Dallas Farmers Market, Albertsons and Central Market. But these light, crisp cookies with 39 flavors are local, starting just 12 years ago by the efforts of Paul Wackym.

Wackym, 59, founded the business in the fall of 2008, during the recession. He was laid off from Home Interiors and Gifts and wanted to pursue opportunities outside the corporate world.

With 25 years as a food judge at the State Fair of Texas and experience working as a product development manager for Neiman Marcus, Wackym has always had a passion for confections.

So when he had the time, with encouragement from his partner, he started baking small batches of his cookie recipes in a friend's rented kitchen space.

"I started selling outside at the Dallas Farmers Market," Wackym says. "The inside market did not exist yet. I stood on the docks every Saturday and Sunday – in the freezing cold of the winter and blazing heat of the summer – and slowly built a loyal following.

"Week after week, I showed up and made a few cookies and sold a few containers, and gradually, I started selling more and more. Something inside me gave me confidence that if I made a great product and kept showing up, the customers would follow."

Wackym's recipes are his own, many of them inspired by family recipes. Over the years, he has extended his customer base, selling cookies in other farmers markets and grocery stores.

This month marks a 10-year partnership with Central Market, and Wackym will celebrate with his new Hatch chile red hots, a sweet, spicy cookie with cinnamon and chile flavors.

Wackym's Kitchen originally started off with five flavors; chocolate-snicker doodle, lemon, mocha-chocolate chip, peanut butter crunch and oatmeal-walnut-currant. With nearly 40 varieties now, Wackym still looks for ways to switch things up. Oftentimes, he uses his customers as a focus group.

"There are some retailers that I still personally inventory and stock," Wackym says, "like Jimmy's in East Dallas. The Coppell Farmers Market also continues to be a really important place for me to test and try new recipes and engage with customers one-on-one. I really love watching people taste our cookies and seeing my friends."

Over the past 12 years, Wackym's Kitchen has seen great growth. In 2018, Wackym purchased a 10,000-square-foot kitchen. The business has grown from two to 10 full-time employees and usually hires seasonal employees during the holidays.

The recipes and cooking methods have remained the same since the beginning, though Wackym says he and his team have become more efficient over the years.

"Our new kitchen has two Hobart ovens that, along with our custom oven racks, bake 6,400 cookies during each rotation," Wackym says, "and that allows us to comfortably produce 50,000 cookies a day... We strive to create consistent, surprising and delightful flavors to address every want, need and desire in a treat.

"We encourage teamwork, hard work and humor in the kitchen; nothing makes a cookie taste better than when it's made with a hearty laugh."

To this day, the East Dallas resident plays a significant role in Wackym's Kitchen's operations. He still answers customers' phone calls and emails, rather than have a designated employee do these tasks. He also enjoys helping customers place orders online when they can't find their favorite flavors in stores.

While no restaurant, bar or bakery has gone unaffected by the coronavirus pandemic, Wackym's Kitchen has been able to stay afloat, aiming to bring comfort to customers during this time.

"When Dallas County shut down, many of our customers increased their orders to levels that were hard to fulfill," Wackym says. "Other customers stopped ordering completely. From week to week, and sometimes from day to day, we had trouble staffing because we did not know how many employees to schedule."

Orders would vary drastically – for example, one day would have no orders and three days later, there would be so many that they couldn't fulfill them. It's been "a roller coaster ride," but they've been able to keep up while keeping everything clean and everyone healthy.

"On the plus side, our internet business has been really active," he says, "and it is lovely seeing all of the generosity of our customers giving to friends and family during the pandemic."

Wackym's Kitchen cookies are available at select grocery stores and online.

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