

Making it in Leeds

News from Leeds Manufacturing

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Exquisite Taste of £1.7M Success

Chartered accountant Viv Parry had a dream of quitting the service sector and getting into manufacturing, coupled with a lifelong passion for quality home baking.

The dream came true when she paid £20,000 for the assets of a small Leeds bakery and seven years on Viv and her 30 colleagues at Exquisite Hand Made Cakes are celebrating turnover of £1.7M and 30% year on year growth for the past two years.

Exquisite's basic ranges are gateaux, loaves, tray-bakes and wrapped products selling across the UK, predominantly through major distributors and into outlets including cafes and leading airlines.

"It was tough at first, cramming all the product samples into a small car for sales trips, then, with no credit lines, dashing round to pay ingredients suppliers in cash before they would release the goods. But by not compromising on the home-baked and hand-crafted quality ethos and listening to customer feedback, the business took off," says director Viv Parry.

“We’re really not doing anything much different to a housewife committed to quality cake creation – but we’ve got a much bigger kitchen and equipment.”

Interpreting the feedback has been a key factor in astute product development – an ongoing process that underpins the company’s impressive growth. Starting with two units at Kirkstall’s Cardigan Works, the operation has more than doubled that to five units spanning 6,000 square feet.

The hand-crafted approach and commitment to new product development also creates the flexibility to work with existing and potential customers in developing new lines, key factors in a new business win with a major sandwich bar group. Production director and master baker Chris Parrington manages the process.

He joined the company five years ago having plied his craft in venues as diverse as major cruise liners, RHM and the Co-op and clearly shares Viv’s vision and passion for the products and the dedicated team making them.

“We have regular tasting panels and if a line doesn’t retain the great “just home-baked” taste, it doesn’t go out,” says Chris, adding: “And that’s a very rare occurrence.”

The customised approach inevitably brings in its train some basic chores, chief of which is the hand-washing of hundreds of cake tins after every bake. But there’s a real feeling of shop-floor good nature and job-sharing in this enterprising company.

Smart new packaging, developed in line with a retail focused re-brand and robust enough to protect and display exquisite goods, is also made of recyclable materials in line with the company’s environmental policy.

Further growth is planned and, according to Chris, need not be inhibited by the labour intensive production processes: “Mechanisation just wouldn’t work for us. Within two years, we will acquire or build larger premises from scratch, but as close to here as possible in order to retain the current staff.”

Paul Stephens, Leeds City Council’s chief economic development officer, said: “From a standing start, Viv and the team have achieved impressive growth and are now set for further expansion.

Entrepreneurs like Viv have a key role to play in creating employment and developing a thriving economy.”

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Note to Editors:

Leeds is the UK’s second largest centre for manufacturing outside London, with over 36,000 people employed by 1,815 companies across engineering, print and paper manufacture, food and drink, electronics, textiles and medical technologies. The sector generates 10.8% of the city’s £15 billion annual output.

