

By Symone C. Skrzycki

BREAKING THE MOLD

Candlemaker Creates Memories

It's shortly after 10 a.m. when Jackie Carberry enters Warm Glow Candle Company's outlet store. Beaming, she's bundled in a coat and carrying Vettie, one of her pet labradoodles.

Carberry's exuberance matches the shop's setting. It treats the eyes to diverse colors, candles, home décor, gourmet foods and more. An enigmatic aroma fills the air.

The thriving business along Interstate 70 and Centerville Road outside Richmond started as a small operation in Carberry's basement. She launched the endeavor with her husband, Alan, in 1995.

"We always say that we create memories with our fragrances," Carberry imparts. "Our niche in the market is food fragrances – our Cinnamon Bun, our Carrot Cake. All of those. Evening Mocha. So many of our fragrances revolve around food.

"There's times I've been out here talking with guests and they've been through situations in their lives – whether it be an injury to themselves or a loss to the family. They'll tell us that this is their happy place," she reveals. "Maybe they don't even buy anything. They just walk through. They inhale the fragrances. They're greeted warmly

by our guest service team. And it's their happy place."

Warm Glow candles are 100% hand dipped at its nearby factory. During the busy holiday season, it produces up to 10,000 daily.

Personal touch

Ever wonder how Warm Glow's trademark lumpy, bumpy candles wind up that way? It's all in a day's work at the 80,000 square-foot-factory.

"Hey, Mike!" Carberry calls out to 12-year veteran Mike Stephens.

"He pours all the candles," she explains. "What we do is, we purchase wax (in boxes). We put the wax in big steam jacketed vats, so it turns the wax into a liquid that looks a little bit like water. When the melted wax reaches the correct temperature, Mike draws it into a pale and adds scented oil and colored dye. Then he hand pours the liquid wax into the molds. He tops off the molds with more liquid wax after that starts to harden. Once the wax is set in the mold, we take them out by hand and drill the molds for the wick to be added. We then have a dipping process that gives our candles that signature lumpy, bumpy exterior we're known for.

"So, what Mike does is make the core of the candle. The heart of the candle!"

Stephens chuckles good-naturedly. He relishes the unpredictability that comes with his job.

"It's a challenge. Nothing is the same (from one day to the next)," he remarks. "No wax is the same. No fragrance is the same. And a lot of times, I have to use stearic – it's a granulated acid – to make it slide out of the molds."

Carberry seconds that. "Our wax is never quite the same way twice. Even though the sheets say it's all the same, it doesn't always

behave. And he always has to adjust. The humidity in the summer is very difficult for us. We're constantly adjusting because of weather conditions and the wax."

Employee Elizabeth Zimmer looks up from her spot on the production line.

"Elizabeth has been with us since we started in our house," Carberry proudly reveals. "What she does is she takes the core and she drills it and then she threads the candle with the wick; she puts the wicking through it."

Ahead are three dippers.

"They're putting the lumpy, bumpy exterior on. Then they (the candles) go on the conveyor line and go down and then they're bagged and taken down to shipping," Carberry observes.

One of the dippers is Pat Dunaway, who joined the team 14 years ago. Her take on what's most enjoyable about working at Warm Glow?

"I like it all," she offers with a smile.

"What can I say?"

Her son, Greg, works a few feet away.

"We have a lot of family," Carberry notes.

'Scents' and sensibility

Back at the outlet store, Christmas music fills the air as customers peruse votive candles, hearth candles (these are the most popular; Warm Glow sells 122,000 of them alone each year), wick loaves, scented wax chips and rose chips.

Carberry talks about her pet-friendly business philosophy, employee appreciation and changing with the times at a cozy table in the on-site café.

"This is a 20,000-square-foot footprint out here," she observes, "and even though all of our product is represented, it's too much space for what we produce alone. So, we've diversified a lot. We do a lot with homemade-types – jams and jellies and salsa. We sell Indiana beers and wine. The chocolates are a big hit. We have a full-time floral designer that does a beautiful job. We try to meet the needs of our guests coming off the interstate, which really vary."

The employee count varies based on time of year, but as of mid-November there were approximately 50 full- and part-time team members. Warm Glow makes 72 different fragrances. The most popular scents are Evening Mocha and Cinnamon Bun.

Why take the lumpy and bumpy route?

"There weren't as many of those on the market (when the business began)," Carberry recalls. "We were kind of the only show in town. There are now some other companies that do a lumpy, bumpy (candle), but



All hands on deck: The production crew consists of 15 people. Most are cross-trained to handle multiple areas.



everyone was doing the glass jars. We wanted something different."

"My office is at the factory. I'm only here (at the store) periodically," Carberry comments. "I have a great management team out here and we have a great guest service team. That's what it takes."

Warm Glow operates the outlet as its only retail site. It wholesales to about 2,000 stores – primarily small boutiques.

Looking down at Vettie, who hasn't left her arms, Carberry laughs.

"We're very much animal advocates.

That's why we invite people to bring their animals into the store with them. My four dogs come and go with me every day to work. That's what helps us all get through the day – unconditional love."

She contends that the candle making business has become increasingly challenging because the way customers shop has changed. Warm Glow keeps the fires burning by adapting and evolving.

"I think now, guests want more of an experience than they did before," Carberry asserts. "Once a month our marketing



The scent of snickerdoodles and caramel coffee cake fills the air. Later in the process, wax scraps are re-melted to reduce waste.



Owner Jackie Carberry is passionate about candles, people (and animals).

Carberry admits that Warm Glow’s foray into e-commerce was a daunting move.

“I’m a dinosaur. I order nothing online!” she quips. “That (change) was difficult for me. But you have to do it. You have to have that presence and you have to build it because it’s the way of the world.

“Honestly – and I say this kind of tongue and cheek – but it used to be that it was just like, ‘Build it and they will come.’ It’s not so much that (way) anymore.”

Community core

Carberry is a member of the Reid Health Foundation board of directors and recently resigned from the Wayne County Convention and Tourism Board after 15 years of service.

“We work hand in hand with the Boys and Girls Club; with Genesis of the YWCA, which is a battered women’s shelter. We always have Toys for Tots out here. I don’t know that there’s a non-profit organization that we haven’t worked with in some form,” she affirms.

Carberry applauds the community’s entrepreneurial culture.

“We (she and Alan) came from Valparaiso. I love it up there, but I don’t feel we would have experienced the amount of growth and . . . whatever we needed along the way up there that we have here,” she reflects. “They (the Richmond community) really embrace entrepreneurship. Any door that we needed open seemed to have been opened to us. It’s so important to me to be able to give back.

“We feel extraordinarily blessed to be here.”

director tries to have a function out here. We do something different – whether it be music. We’ve had a car show. We’ve done all kinds of different things.”

A Santa’s Village open house attracts thousands each year. The recently-opened artisan shop features local handcrafted treasures.

RESOURCE: Warm Glow Candle Company at www.warmglow.com