

Natalie Locke Milne

**Lisa Bunting**, head sugar mama, Sweet Rage Inc.

A family recipe for butter brittle has been the key to Lisa Bunting's sweet success. Bunting, the co-owner of St. Catharines, Ont.-based Sweet Rage Bakery and YUMporium, had a sense that consumers were growing tired of over-processed, mass-produced sweets. Instead she saw a growing market for hand-made, gourmet candy and specialty desserts made with only the finest, purest ingredients. Armed with a no-fail recipe for butter brittle, the aspiring entrepreneur soon developed a variety of candy, desserts and cakes that quickly became all the rage with friends and family.

For 15 years Bunting dreamed of taking her part-time business full-time, and in 2005 she opened Sweet Rage in a small storefront in St. Catharines. During the first year, friend and former co-worker Lara Lorge-Pantusa began helping out whenever she could, eventually becoming a partner when the business made its move to a larger location earlier this year. With Bunting handcrafting every gourmet treat and Lorge-Pantusa in charge of sales and marketing, the partners make sure to infuse fun and humour in every aspect of the business (every employee is lovingly referred to as a "sugar mama").

Its new location has enabled Sweet Rage to expand production more than three-fold. Meanwhile, the famous All the Rage Butter Brittle continues to be a signature product for the company, and is incorporated into a number of decadent sweets, including All the Rage Cheesecake and Everything But the Kitchen Sink cookies.

Sweet Rage's Lisa Bunting (left) and Lara Lorge-Pantusa



## Q&A

**What do you love most about your job and why?**

"Everyday it's something different. Now in this bigger location we have a bit of a learning curve, but we are always looking down the road. Everything is an ongoing learning process from the marketing to the recipes, to product development, packaging, legal aspects and copyright. There's never a dull moment."

**What is your management philosophy?**

"I believe very much that happy employees equal happy customers. We try to make work an experience for [our employees] because if they like being here and they're constantly learning it reflects in how they deal with customers."

**What is the most challenging part of your job?**

"I think it goes hand in hand with what I love most about it – that it's a constant learning process. I'm always pushing myself outside of my comfort zone, which is great because it leads to excellent personal and professional development."

**How would you describe your operational or management style?**

"I believe that it takes all different sorts to run a business, and everybody brings something different to the table. In

our operations and our management we always try to think outside of the box and see it [from everyone's side]."

**Where do you see the confectionery sector going?**

"I see the gourmet candy and dessert sector growing because when people have a special treat, whether it's a wedding cake or dinner with friends, they don't want over-processed foods. They want to make it the best treat they've ever had because they don't indulge as often."

**What are the issues your sector is facing?**

"Being able to service people with different dietary needs. Diabetes is unfortunately a growing epidemic, but people still want to be able to have really good food. It's growing the options for all of the different factions of society, like vegans, diabetics and people with gluten issues."

## INTHE SPOTLIGHT

**FIRST INDUSTRY JOB:** "I made salads and desserts at the Big Wheel restaurant in St. Catharines, Ont."

**FAVOURITE FOOD:** "Really good sweets are not only a living but also a passion for me."

**INDUSTRY MENTOR:** "John Young, an individual I met while going through the small business program at Niagara College. He's just brilliant in marketing, and he really enabled me to feel like I could take my business from part-time to the next level."