

News

Obituaries

Classifieds

Jobs

Homes

Boocoo

Coupons

Events

Weekly Ad

03/23/2012 - Member Login | Become a Member | Today's Front Page

toledoBlade.com



**Lucas County Kids
FREE on Saturdays!**
12 and under, 2 kids admitted per paid adult.



NEWS

SPORTS

A&E

BUSINESS

OPINION

OUR TOWN SYLVANIA

CUSTOMER

[Art](#) [Books](#) [Culture](#) [Movies](#) [Food](#) [Music-Theater-Dance](#) [Peach Weekender](#) [Restaurant Reviews](#) [TV-Radio](#) [Frogtown](#) [Gardening](#) [TV L](#)


safecount.net



We'd like your opinion. Your feedback could help improve your browsing experience. Share with us!



Home » A&E » Food

Published: 2/21/2012

The joy of cookies

Maumee's Almondina blossomed from family recipe

BY DANIEL NEMAN
BLADE FOOD EDITOR

0

[Facebook](#)[Twitter](#)[Reddit](#)[Digg](#)[E-mail](#)[Print](#)[Rss](#)

The cookie itself resembles a thin biscotti, though perhaps with more almonds. The story of how it came to be made spans a century, beginning in what was then called Palestine, weaving a musical route through Europe -- with a stop in England for love -- and then winding up in Maumee after a long interlude with the Toledo Symphony.

At the beginning of the story is Dina Nathanson, a French-trained chef who lived in Haifa in what is now Israel. More than 80 years ago, she developed a recipe for what she called petit gateau sec, which is French for "little dried cakes." They were an instant hit with her family, friends, and neighbors.

"She was quite extraordinary, not least because she invented this cookie that was 80 years ahead of its time -- low calorie, all natural, no cholesterol, no trans fats," said her grandson, Yuval Zaliouk.

In 1989, Mr. Zaliouk took that same recipe he learned from his mother ("It was supposed to pass from daughter to daughter to daughter, but I intervened," he said) and began baking the cookies in his kitchen of his Maumee home.

He called the cookies Almondina in tribute to his grandmother Dina, and he began selling them around the region. His first sale was to The Andersons.

"I took the cookie in my hand and took it to Dick Anderson. He tasted it and literally picked up the phone and called the food buyer," Mr. Zaliouk said.

Leaps of faith



Today, his company, YZ Enterprises, bakes 180,000 cookies a day in eight flavors -- seven of them created by Mr. Zaliouk himself, and the eighth his grandmother's original recipe. They are sold in all 50 states and also are exported overseas.



Almondina founder Yuval Zaliouk with his almond biscuits during production at the YZ Enterprises, Inc. cookie factory in Maumee. THE BLADE/LORI KING [Enlarge](#) | [Photo Reprints](#)

Search:

Related stories

■ [Cookies for sale](#)



Almondina almond biscuits. *THE BLADE/LORI KING*[Enlarge](#) | [Photo Reprints](#)

Not bad for an orchestra conductor.

The genial Mr. Zaliouk, 73, was music director of the Toledo Symphony for nine years before he founded his company. In one leap of faith, he added business and baking to a life that had already followed two distinct paths, music and law.

Mr. Zaliouk was born in Haifa to a mother who was a pianist and a father who was a violinist. He grew up playing the

piano and later the trombone, but he went to Hebrew University in Jerusalem to study law. At the same time, however, he was studying conducting at the Rubin Academy of Music, also in Jerusalem.

He earned his law degree and was admitted to the bar in Israel, and then he moved to England "on the pretext of polishing my legal studies." He worked there in a law office, but he also went to the Guildhall School of Music in London, where he said he took lessons in conducting from Sir Colin Davis and Sir Adrian Boult.

Dancing to her music

At the end of the term at Guildhall, the conducting students were given a movement or two to conduct in a concert -- Mr. Zaliouk's piece was the last two movements of the Scottish Symphony by Felix Mendelssohn. He was such a success that the next day he went to the school's head and said the head should either help him find a job in music or else he would go back to law.

A couple of weeks later, he received a letter from the Royal Ballet Company, offering him a position conducting the ballet orchestra. He accepted, and his first performance was Swan Lake in Liverpool, where the company was on tour. Under the stage getting ready to perform, the dancers heard the orchestra and were impressed.

"I heard this incredibly spirited version of Swan Lake," one of the dancers said. This May, Sue and Yuval Zaliouk will celebrate their 40th anniversary.



YZ Enterprises, Inc. is a family business: from left - Sue Zaliouk, her daughter and son-in-law, Tamar and Jason Markham, and founder Yuval Zaliouk. They are holding a photo of Yuval Zaliouk's grandmother, Dina Nathanson, whose recipe inspired the almond biscuit. *THE BLADE/LORI KING*

[Enlarge](#) | [Photo Reprints](#)

"For five years she danced to my music, and for 40 years I have been dancing to hers," Mr. Zaliouk joked.

After his time with the ballet, he wanted to branch out into symphonic music, spending many years as a guest conductor with an assortment of English orchestras. But then in 1980, a number of American orchestras were looking for conductors, so he came to this country, where he had always wanted to work. He auditioned in several cities and received offers from the orchestras in Toledo and Edmonton, which is the hometown of his wife. He accepted both jobs and ran both orchestras for a couple of years, until the time came to choose one.

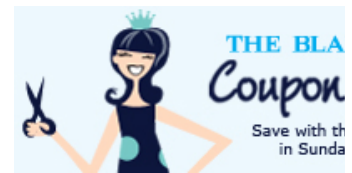
"I had to make up my mind whether I wanted to be in 40-below zero [weather] or 5-below zero," he said with a laugh.



10-yard test

He headed the Toledo orchestra for nine years. When he left as conductor laureate, a position he still holds, he decided to try to make a go of it baking his grandmother's cookies. After establishing the brand locally -- Almondina cookies can be found in many locally owned stores -- he endeavored to expand to a national level. His idea was that if the cookies could be sold in the most famous food store in the United States, he could use that fact as a selling point to get into other stores.

After asking around, he determined the most famous food store in the United States is Zabar's, the iconic Manhattan





Almondina cookies made at the YZ Enterprises, Inc. *THE BLADE/LORI KING* [Enlarge](#) | [Photo Reprints](#)

emporium of food and kitchen implements. The managing partner of Zabar's at the time was Murray Klein who, Mr. Zaliouk said, "had a reputation as a crocodile." Mr. Zaliouk was told, "You'll recognize him because he stands in the middle [of the store] and shouts." He was immediately sought out by Mr. Zaliouk.

"He took a bite. His first question was 'How much will it cost me?' I told him, and he immediately cut it in half." Mr. Zaliouk said.

But Mr. Zaliouk accepted the price, sold him the cookies, and immediately started calling other stores and saying,

"We're in Zabar's."

With key advice from his mentor, Ron Kasperzak, the founder of Calphalon, he soon found success. He often takes the cookies to specialty-food industry trade shows to introduce them to stores around the country. There, he notices what he calls the 10-yard test. People walking past his booth put a cookie in their mouths, walk 10 yards, turn around, and come back to the booth.

Family affair

Sales keep increasing to the point that the company is straining the bounds of a single shift. Even during the current recession, sales have been increasing, Mr. Zaliouk said. "When people don't feel good, they sit in front of the TV eating cookies.

He is quick to point out that this good fortune only comes about because the company works as a team. Along with 15 employees who work on the production line, baking and packaging cookies, another eight people work in the office -- many of them members of his family. Along with his wife Sue, who is the business' co-owner, he also works with their daughter Tamar Markham, who is the vice president of finance, and her husband Jason Markham, who is the sales and marketing director.

It's a family affair, and even the members of the management team who are not actual family -- COO Christopher Moody and national sales manager Jeffrey Wolff -- are considered members of the family, Mr. Zaliouk said.

So strong is this familial pull at the company that Mrs. Markham, who had been an investigator for the New York Stock Exchange, and Mr. Markham, who had been operations manager for Quad/Graphics, the second-largest printing company in America, left New York and returned to Toledo to work there.


"So many young people leave Toledo. We're proud to have them come back," Mr. Zaliouk said.


With such an emphasis on family, it is no surprise that the company office walls are hung with pictures of the family and close friend Jack Hunter, who helped start it up. In Mr. Zaliouk's modest office -- one corner is devoted to a small folding table with a few spices, a couple of extracts, and some baking soda that he refers to as his "laboratory" -- there is a large photograph of his wife when she was a dancer and an actress auditioning for the role of Natasha in a BBC production of War and Peace (she didn't get the part, but she appeared in all the ballroom scenes as a dancer). He also has separate pictures of his mother and grandmother above his desk.

And in the company lobby hangs a small photo of his grandmother Dina along with a particularly apt sentiment from the Bible: "With the fruits of her hand she plants a vineyard."

That vineyard has taken root in Maumee and continues to blossom today.

Contact Daniel Neman at dneman@theblade.com or 419-724-6155.





deals you dig

DIGGIT

For daily deals, Go to DIGGIT.tv &

sign up today!

CLICK HERE

Guidelines: Please keep your comments smart and civil. Don't attack other readers personally, and keep your language decent. If a comment violates these standards or our [privacy statement](#) or [visitor's agreement](#), click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report abuse. To post comments, you must be a Facebook