Brazilian native brings sweet business to Oakland County

For confectioner Danny Ceconi of Royal Oak, the journey to entrepreneurship is proceeding one smile at a time. Ceconi and her business partner Marina Kapordelis of Ferndale recently opened Doce Brigadeiro featuring Brazilian handmade gourmet sweets.

“It’s fun to see how people react to trying our brigadeiros,” said Ceconi. “They think they are going to like it, but it goes above their expectations. Everyone who eats one smiles right away, it’s instant.” A popular Brazilian treat, brigadeiros’ main ingredients consist of condensed milk, cream and chocolate. Doce Brigadeiro offers 21 flavors including mint, toffee, lemon zest and sea salt caramel; as well as milk, dark and white chocolate.

Born in Brazil, Ceconi grew up eating the tempting sweets and first came to Michigan on an exchange program to learn English after finishing high school. A few years later after receiving an undergraduate degree, she was back in Michigan visiting friends when she decided to work on a master’s degree at Walsh College. “I love Michigan and it just felt right,” said Ceconi, who received her master’s in business management in March.

She got involved with the college’s Blackstone LaunchPad entrepreneurship initiative after seeing “Entrepreneurs Wanted” banners around campus. “I didn’t know what the word entrepreneur was, so I googled it and saw the meaning,” said Ceconi whose native language is Portuguese.

“I met Carol Glynn and her LaunchPad team and they helped me with pretty much everything. I’m a foreigner and I had to start with baby steps. If it wasn’t for Walsh, I wouldn’t be able to do what I love to do.” Ceconi and Kapordelis were advised on registering their business, setting up an LLC, best business practices for becoming profitable and brand building. The new entrepreneurs are currently busy with special orders and catering wedding, holiday parties and other special events as they explore opportunities to rent commercial kitchen space — a key to allowing them to expand their business.
Working under the Cottage Food Law, the business partners make small amounts of brigadeiros from their homes — a true labor of love, taking more than two hours to produce 30 pieces. Ingredients are stirred for an hour, cooled and hand rolled. Larger orders are made overnight from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. in the kitchen of a Clawson restaurant owned by Kapordelis’s husband.

Cecconi’s advice for others about to embark on an entrepreneurial quest — “Do something that you are really passionate about. You are going to face a lot of barriers. So many people give up when they don’t see money right away. If you do what you love, it never seems too hard because you’re doing it from the heart. I love my business and I love making people smile after eating our sweets.”

Walsh College Blackstone LaunchPad helps aspiring entrepreneurs develop and launch their businesses. It is funded by the Blackstone Charitable Foundation, and in partnership with New Economy Initiative, a program of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan; Automation Alley, University of Miami, Walsh College and Wayne State University. For more information, call 248-756-4251 or email docebshop@gmail.com.

— Submitted by Catherine Ticer of Brilliance Marketing