



Fallbrook woman seeks 'fortune' in cookies

By: JESSICA MUSICAR - For the North County Times

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FALLBROOK ---- Anyone who has ever eaten at a Chinese restaurant is probably familiar with the ever-present fortune cookie and its sometimes not-so-unique fortunes.

But these cookies with a message have taken on a new dimension at Expressive Fortunes, a Fallbrook cookie company that transforms the sweets into unique gifts with a personal flair, especially since customers can write their own fortune.

Offered in three sizes ranging from classic to giant ---- about 6 1/2 inches in diameter ---- the cookies are hand-dipped in white or dark chocolate, and then decorated with sprinkles or sugar decorations in any one of 40 themes. Themes include anniversary, bon voyage, friendship, gambling, music, naughty romance, race cars and religion.

Given as gifts, party favors or turndown treats at hotels, the unique cookies are the brainchild of Stephanie Benner, owner of Expressive Fortunes, which she founded in December 2003.

"The joy of it all is that we personalize the fortune that goes in the cookie so you can give someone a personal and unique gift," Benner said. "People's reaction to them is, 'Oh my gosh, they are almost too beautiful to eat,' but they are delicious."

Benner said the cookies are baked in a Los Angeles bakery, but she and her staff decorate and insert fortunes at her Fallbrook location. Classic-sized cookies come with standard Chinese fortunes, unless purchased in a batch of 250 or more.

If customers can't think of their own message or fortune to place in the cookies, Benner offers a list of ideas such as "Tonight you will suffer from lack of sleep, but due to good fortune ... " and "An awaited apology is destined to come your way. I'm sorry!"

Giant fortune cookies cost \$26.95, and medium-sized versions retail at \$21.95. Classic-sized cookies are available individually wrapped or in pails of up to 25.

Benner said she also sells her cookies wholesale to event planners and some stores such as the Candy Boutique in Chula Vista. The fortune cookies have also been featured in several TV shows and in celebrity gift bags at the Nickelodeon Kids Choice Awards.

James Cleary, vice president of hotel operations at Cache Creek Casino Resort in Brooks, near Sacramento, said his resort has been purchasing Expressive Fortunes cookies for about six months and using them as a turndown amenity for guests.

"We were looking for a specialized amenity for turndown that was both unique and high quality," Cleary said, adding that the resort periodically changes its cookie messages to keep regular clients curious. Its latest fortune reads, "Your stay at Cache Creek will bring you good fortune, fun and relaxation."

"We've been very satisfied with product and service, and (it is) very well received by our guests," Cleary said.

Benner said before starting up Expressive Fortunes, she owned a pottery business, but some personal problems led her to change her career. At first, she decorated cookies as a fun gift for friends, and then said she realized they could be a lucrative business.

Since that time, she has produced thousands of cookies and plans to add Rice Krispies-like treats and flavored gourmet popcorn to her product line. Expressive Fortunes grossed \$86,000 in 2004.

Web site: <http://www.expressivefortunes.com>

"I pride myself on producing a quality product," Benner said. "No matter how big I get, the (cookies) will never lose personality."

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