

Oerth's Espresso Café: not your daily grind

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Candy Oerth was a stay at home Mom, but today Oerth is an entrepreneurial grandmother of five who is on the go.

Six days a week the Iowa born woman rises and shines as the owner/operator of Espresso Café at the corner of Reidville Road and Highway 290 in Duncan. Step aside Starbucks and Cinnabon franchisees, this former homemaker, master mixologist and baker extraordinaire, Candy, the "Oerth Mother" has the business and the tummy twinges locked up in Duncan at her Poplar Springs Plaza locale and the lady shows no signs of slowing up.

An early riser, Oerth leaves her Moore home and can be found at her shop before 7:00 a.m. firing up her oven. Among Oerth's first customers are those from the medical community who pick up their pre-orders of her melt in your mouth cinnamon rolls or blueberry scones. (Psst, if you want to partake in these delicacies before batch #2 comes out of the oven just before 9 a.m. you too can call ahead.) Once the coffee's brewing, Oerth's next task at hand is her daily morning trips to her shopping center neighbor, Publix. "I think I am their best customer," she laughs as she wheels a cart into her restaurant.

Oerth, who is the mother of three grown children, began her training as a young girl when her own mother went to work. Candy was charged with starting supper for her brother and herself and loved the experience. "The kitchen and quality food preparation has always been a priority for me," she said. As a mother, Oerth's

expertise increased and by the time her youngest daughter, Megan, took the job as Espresso's first employee almost 12 years ago, Oerth was looking to expand her daytime duties by seeking part-time employment as well. She landed a job at the River Falls area coffee gathering spot as a waitress and her daughter's assistant. "My daughter was my boss for 1 and 1/2 years," she laughingly recalled.

The organized super mom's skills with pots and pans were quickly recognized and she was moved into the kitchen operation. Oerth so impressed the shop's original owners, Mark and Tina Russell, that when they wanted to sell the business they offered it to her. The idea started to simmer a bit but, "It was not the right time for me to buy the place back then," she recalled.

Committed to the concept and already familiarizing herself with the customer base Oerth continued to work at the establishment. Now three additional owners later, Oerth is the owner and she's worn that hat since 2004. "No one else has the passion for this business like I do," she explained. "This is a great environment," Oerth said proudly. "We have wonderful customers and good employees. Multi-tasking is the norm here." Pausing she thoughtfully added, "I would like a bigger kitchen. When we are busy it is almost like a dance we do back there to get around each other. On a good day it really flows," she said.

Though her days may often times be long and her kitchen a bit too small, Oerth has realized a dream and all of the menu selections and baked goods are now her own creations. In the coffee department



Photo by Ian Clarke

Candy Oerth, owner of Espresso Café, is a seasoned baker and coffee beverage expert. Here she is shown removing a batch of her famous blueberry scones from the baking pan.

Oerth's brewing expertise and mixing mastery have earned her mountain-peak perfection and an International Academy of Specialty Coffees Barista designation. She is the only individual in the Palmetto state to have earned this distinction and as a result of her proficiency; she is always brewing up new drink ideas from behind her counter. "I do know my drinks and I have one of the largest inventories of Torani Syrups in the area," she commented. One of my daughters is a diabetic so for her alone I stock 16 sugar free varieties."

Traveling to annual Coffee Fests, Oerth has also brought the worlds

best back to her coffee loving clientele. Her zeal for developing new concoctions has spilled over to her employees and one recently admitted to creating two new milkshake recipes, a S'more treat and a mint-infused Grasshopper Pie ice cream confection. Since she is a licensed coffee beverage specialist, Oerth wants to share the joys of the dark roasted bean beverage with all and so she offers free Espresso mini samples daily. Customers who participate in her Coffee Card program don't even need to keep up with their card. Client names and their favorite coffee recipe are neatly logged onto the card and filed into a recipe box

where it can easily be retrieved and stamped each time the customer arrives needing their java fix. "I have a fair amount of regular customers," said Oerth. "They like to be recognized and I like to greet them and serve them their favorite quickly and efficiently."

Like the familiar and friendly atmosphere created by Sam Malone at Cheers, Candy's customers appreciate the comfort of her food and a familiar stool or table within her restaurant. Her reputation to please and her skill with the Espresso machine have extended far beyond the confines of this Middle Tyger community's borders. The ranks of nearby

BMW supplier company employees have also become frequent visitors. On any given day you'll hear German or Italian accents chatting amidst the clink of coffee cups. Since the business is located so close to River Ridge Elementary and a couple of other District Five Schools, Oerth also counts Principal Tim Henson and the educator set among her regulars. "I always keep a school calendar," she said. "On Teacher Work Days and in the weeks just before and after the school year begins and ends, I prepare extra food."

A confessed "foodie" Oerth has been collecting recipes for years. Her cookbook collection is well into the 100's. "I read a cookbook like a paperback," she said. Oerth is also the proud owner of her grandmother's recipe box, which she inherited years ago, and regularly uses. A fan of the Food Network, Oerth is often a frequent viewer. It appears her eldest grandson; eight-year-old Miles, in spending time with his grandmother has been bitten by the food bug too. "My grandson can name all of the food show stars and he tells me that he wants to take over my business when he's 18," she mused. Perhaps that may be the case one day but for the time being, there's soup to be stirred, a chicken breast and veggies to grill and another batch of scones to ice.

Espresso Café is open Monday through Saturday for breakfast and lunch. During the weekdays the hours are 7 a.m. -3 p.m. On Saturday the hours of operation are 8:30 a.m. -3 p.m. The phone number is 433-9030. The restaurant also maintains a fax line for orders: 486-8627.