

Sweet Success in San Diego – and Beyond

FOOD: Maya's Cookies a Tasty Part of Black History Month

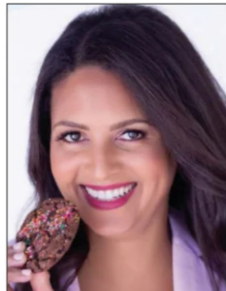
■ By KAREN PEARLMAN

SAN DIEGO - Maya Madsen is still making the world smile more, a few sprinkles at a time.

Nearly 10 years after bootstrapping her homemade cookie business, going it alone at local farmers' markets with a tent, signs and tables laid out with freshly baked goodies, Madsen has put together several years of strong year-over-year growth in two brick-and-mortar locations in San Diego County.

Maya's Cookies, still wafting the heavenly scent of chocolate chip cookies into the air from its original Grantville headquarters off Mission Gorge Road as well as at its second spot that opened near Cal State San Marcos in 2022, and has grown 20% YoY since 2020, with nearly two baker's dozen employees and plans to expand her reach.

Madsen said the spot in San Marcos is growing "slowly but surely." Nestled across from student dorms at CSUSM in the middle of other food-focused businesses in the North City development, Madsen said sales dip a bit during the summer when students leave campus, but the location remains a popular spot to host quarterly community events.



Maya Madsen
Founder & CEO
Maya's Cookies

Plant-Based Niche

Maya's Cookies are vegan, meaning their ingredients are sans animal products like milk, eggs, lard and gelatin. Her vegan journey began about 15 years ago for health reasons but has since evolved to one of compassion for animals and concern about



Maya's Cookies Founder and CEO Maya Madsen (left, shown here with San Marcos Mayor Rebecca Jones) expanded her Grantville-based headquarters to a second spot in San Marcos in 2022. Photo by Karen Pearlman

factory farm systems, she said, leading her to an understanding about and being an advocate for the environment.

She said she got into the baking business because, "I love cookies!" and had been searching for a "Mrs. Fields-style cookie" that was plant-based. Seeing none in the market, Madsen created one herself, taking a traditional chocolate chip recipe and making it vegan, adding her own special touches with flavors and texture.

Now the company offers myriad kinds of cookies in addition to perennial fave chocolate chip -- including S'mores,

double chocolate, birthday cake and snickerdoodle.

A respected voice in the Black-owned and women-owned business communities, in late January, Madsen, 54, recently released her fourth annual Black History Collection of cookies. This year's collection available during February in support of Black History Month is dedicated to Black athletes breaking barriers and pushing for more inclusion both on and off the field.

This year's collection honors retired National Basketball

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Association star Earvin "Magic" Johnson's "MVP," a brown sugar cookie with chocolate chips, caramel chips, toasted pecans, and shredded coconut, blanketed in caramelized vegan condensed milk; the late Olympics track and field sensation Florence Griffith-Joyner's "Trailblazer," a vanilla bean butter rum cookie with rich toffee flavors, sweetly spiced with cinnamon and shimmering with gold sparkle; and tennis icon Serena Williams' "Grand Slam," an ode to old school Moon Pies, with rich chocolate dough filled with cookie butter, pieces of premium Kanda dark chocolate and stuffed with gelatin-free marshmallow.

Married for 30 years with three sons, Madsen became an entrepreneur when her children were teenagers, as "a side hustle to help pay for their college tuition," she said. (All have since graduated and one of her sons works as Maya's Cookies' director of finance.)

Scaling Up

Madsen said her official foray into the cookie business began in 2015 when she took out a credit card with a \$3,000 limit and used it to buy permits, signage, a tent, tables and baking supplies.

Two years later, she reached out to Accessity (formerly Accion San Diego), a nonprofit committed to uplifting underrepresented and underserved entrepreneurs with their financial needs. Madsen paid off an initial \$5,000 loan from Accessity and later took out other loans from the group to



Elizabeth Schott
CEO
Accessity

scale up. Madsen said she also received valuable learning opportunities through a few business accelerators, including Stella Labs and Black Ambition.

"Maya's journey with Accessity is a testament to her passion and dedication to her business, and it's so exciting to witness her growth and innovation over the years," Accessity CEO Elizabeth Schott said. "Her business has flourished since she received her first loan in 2017, and has since had a second and third loan. Seeing businesses like Maya's Cookies thrive and achieve success fuels our work at Accessity -- the joy of supporting small businesses as they evolve and make their mark in the local community."

Mentoring Underserved Entrepreneurs

Madsen donates her time volunteering on nonprofit boards such as Junior Achievement of San Diego County and at Accessity events. She also hires and mentors youth and is actively involved in local chambers of commerce and business associations advocating for other woman-owned and BIPOC-owned businesses.

Madsen said that having grown up in an underserved community, she did not see or hear of stories of entrepreneurs or successful businesspeople.

"I once heard someone say, 'You can't be it if you can't see it,'" she said. "I realize that I am the representation I never saw as a young girl. This is why I try to support underserved communities and marginalized groups when opportunities present themselves. I regularly work with nonprofits that provide opportunities to young people such as internships, mentoring and education support."

Maya's Cookies also sells cookie dough, oat milk-based soft serve and branded merchandise, including shirts, hats, water bottles, stickers and pins. Madsen said she is also interested in selling experiences and may offer her cookie baking expertise via classes or "possibly a cookbook" in the future.

Maya's Cookies are still sold at select farmers market around the county, but Madsen said her retail stores and e-commerce are the company's main sales drivers, with steady sales and growing channels.

She said her customers "are basically everyone that loves high quality cookies" and that a large portion of Maya's Cookies' online sales are sent as gifts.

"I like to say, 'Cookies make people happy,' and nothing will put a smile on someone's face faster than a box of cookies shipped to their door," she said. "Most of our customers that visit our retail shops are from San Diego but we do see customers coming from L.A. and the Inland Empire. We ship all across the U.S. but many orders go out to the East Coast, southern states and of course up and down California." ■

Maya's Cookies

FOUNDED: 2015
FOUNDER AND CEO: Maya Madsen
HEADQUARTERS: Grantville, San Diego
BUSINESS: Plant-based cookie manufacturer
EMPLOYEES: 25
WEBSITE: mayascokies.com/
CONTACT: 858-265-9957

SOCIAL IMPACT: Madsen provides mentorship on board of Junior Achievement of San Diego County and works with the JA Fellows at Lincoln High School.
NOTABLE: Madsen is highlighting female- and black-owned companies, offering their beverages in the Maya's Cookies grab-and-go refrigerator.