

Grandson expands grandparents' kettle corn business from farmer's markets to storefront, wholesale

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By **Shandra Martinez | The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS -- **Dorothy & Toto's Gourmet Kettle Corn**, an addicting treat once found only at local farmer's markets, is now available year-round,

Kyle Behm, 24, has taken his snowbird grandparents' seasonal business into a storefront at 2106 Plainfield Ave NE in the building that also houses Weatherhead & Sons.

Opened last week, the three-generation business -- which includes his parents Dan and Barb Behm -- is already popping with customers.

"People take one bite and they can't live without it," Barb said.

What makes the Dorothy & Toto's Gourmet Kettle Corn so addicting?

Well, that's a family secret.

"There's a lot of secrets in terms of how we do it. Our customers tell us it is the best kettle corn they've ever had," Dan said. "That's why we decided to do it.

"We believe in the product. We know we can't put it down when we have it at home."

The family likes to point out that calorie-wise, their kettle corn isn't too decadent: only 120 calories in a two-cup serving.

"The problem is that people have a hard time stopping at a cup," Kyle said.

Customers can watch the corn being popped in an oversized kettle heated with natural gas. Wearing a plastic welding mask, Kyle whips a three-foot wood spatula around the kettle for 30 seconds to keep the kernel from burning in the hot oil and sugar mixture.



"It gets pretty intense pretty fast," said Behm, whose shoulder gets work out with each batch.

After the corn is popped, he dumps it onto a tray with holes so the small pieces fall away leaving the biggest kernels. Salt is added and the corn is left to cool down.

The store isn't far from the Plainfield farmer's market, where Dorothy & Toto's Gourmet Kettle Corn has its biggest following.

In addition to the store, his grandparents, Dorothy and Tony Meyers, will continue to sell their gourmet kettle corn at the Fulton Street, Grandville and Hudsonville farmer's markets during the warm months.

During winter, they relocate to sunny southern Arizona run a similar business.

The couple bought the business in 1990 from an Arizona businessman, but have perfected the recipe over the years.

The kettle corn is named after his grandparents, who are called Dorothy and Toto by their friends.

The logo, designed by Kyle, is of "Wizard of Oz" character Dorothy and her dog, Toto. Well, sort of. Dorothy's face is the image of his grandmother youthful face at 15.

Kyle began helping his grandparents with their business after moving back home from Florida, where he had taken a job after graduating from Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in finance.

"I wanted to take it to the next level because they wanted to retire," he said.

Local grocer Forest Hills Foods is the business' first wholesale customer -- and will receive its first order Saturday.

Kyle, a 2004 Forest Hills Central High School graduate, would like to see more retailers carry the family's signature product.

"I want to make it as big as possible," he said. "The options are endless."

What: Dorothy & Toto's Gourmet Kettle Corn store

Where: 2106 Plainfield Ave NE

Details: dorothyandtotos@gmail.com or 447-9800

-- Press staff writer Cami Reister contributed to this report

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