

Rising to Success

Cindy Helmling and Cornerstone Bread Company bring in the dough



Cindy Helmling (middle) stands with bakers Nicole and Luis.

When the recession hit, Cindy Helmling, formerly an accounting controller, felt the need for a change. "I was tired of pouring everything into my position and then having it change into something else," she says.

After 20 years of working for small- and medium-sized businesses, she found the right ingredients for a new career. Using her MBA knowledge and her love of baking bread, Helmling became the owner and operating manager of Cornerstone Bread Company.

The company makes potato rosemary bread, brioche hamburger buns, whole grain

bread, sourdough bread and a variety of ryes using recipes from the Garfield Bakery that once operated in Indy.

"We have about 75 items that we supply to our restaurant customers," Helmling says. "That means keeping up to a ton of flour on hand weekly and sometimes having to run out to purchase a specialty ingredient."

Her orders range from \$30 — eight to 10 loaves — to \$400-\$600 worth of bread.

"Last year, we sold a quarter of a million of our brioche hamburger buns — more than anyone else in Indy," she says.

Getting to work

That's a lot of bread, so Helmling's day starts early. At 6:30 a.m., she helps Jerry, her

driver, go over the day's deliveries. Two bakers, Nicole and Luis, come in at 8 a.m.

"We work until we get done. We try to go home by mid-afternoon, but sometimes our packers, Kathy and Brian, are here longer since the bread has to cool before being sliced and packaged."

The Cornerstone team delivers freshly baked artisan breads to 50 customers, including The Aristocrat Pub and Restaurant in Broad Ripple, Henry's on East, Papa Roux at 10th Street and Post Road, and Stuar's Steakhouse in Sheridan.

"We are super persistent in keeping our customers happy," Helmling says. "We keep tweaking how we bake a bread to get it to their satisfaction. Our cutoff time for bread orders is noon, but if we have a last-minute need, we bend over backwards to help our customers out. We try to anticipate their needs. Have they run out of bread? Or do they have too much?"



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up and then she cleans up after me — it's not 'Nicole clean.' I have a packer that is a slicing machine; this guy is fast. So I set things up so Brian can do what he does best. Everyone does dishes, but Luis, one of our bakers, often makes time to help with that."

Always on the lookout for new business, Helmling says the timing to establish those relationships can be tricky.

also get out there with people," Helmling says. "It's fun to introduce great breads to consumers. Recently, a farmers market customer said, 'Do you have sourdough bread today? That's the best sourdough bread I've ever had.'

"That's so gratifying to hear as a baker, and it's great to bring those kinds of comments back to my staff." W

BUSINESS TIPS: Cindy Helmling's advice for being your own boss

- > **Train other people in various roles** to maintain the quality of your goods or services to keep your customers more than satisfied. Trying to do it all yourself is not the best use of your time.
- > **Prioritize what you can do and what you have to hire out.** Be prepared to pull together your resources and figure out how they will best be put to use. Having your own business is harder than it looks, but it can be so satisfying.

- > **Take care of your employees.** They depend on you for a paycheck. It's your responsibility to do whatever it takes to keep growing your business.
- > **Collaborate with some of your competition.** Take time to build strong relationships so you can feed each other leads and help each other out. Things happen and you may need assistance with daily operations to keep your business flourishing when met with unforeseen challenges with equipment, your facility or staffing.

