

Katharine Mardirosian and 100 Bowls of Soup

More than seven years ago, an energetic MBA graduate and stay-at-home mom who made soups regularly for her family kicked off a solo business, called 100 Bowls of Soup. The soup-maker, Katharine Mardirosian of McLean, Va., grew up eating delicious, home-made and family-friendly soups. She also spent several years in Eastern Europe, where sturdy homemade soups are mealtime staples. While living there, she honed her soup-making skills, learning to prepare soups from scratch using fresh ingredients. “I experimented with many unfamiliar combinations, using citrus, vinegars, and spices to flavor the soups,” she said.

Back in the States and married with at-home children, Mardirosian — who noted she is not a professional chef — started soup-making as a part of her regular kitchen regimen. “I love the smell of a pot of soup simmering in the kitchen. I was always making soups for my family,” she said, “because we did not like the commercial ones that are so laden with salt, cream and other unwanted ingredients. So I started simply, making my own chicken and vegetable broths as well as a lot of chicken soup.” Mardirosian tested various soups on friends and family and began thinking seriously about a soup-making business, admitting that her first year was a real learning curve.

Mardirosian started selling her soup creations — including bone

broths — at the Reston Farmers’ Market every Saturday during the market season. She was so successful that various food stores, such as the Organic Butcher in McLean and MOM’s Organic Market, purchased her creations. She then opened a small kitchen in Vienna’s Maple Avenue Market. But as her soups gained greater and greater popularity and demand for them expanded, she decided to open a professional, larger-sized commercial soup-making kitchen in Sunset Business Park in Herndon, Va.

Large enough to accommodate walk-in refrigerators and freezers, a 40-gallon stockpot, a soup-packed refrigerator and stock-packed freezer case and kitchen space for other food entrepreneurs, the new space allows Mardirosian to slowly grow her business. “Apart from continuing to make more soup, we are able to experiment with new flavors and new recipes, both vegan and meat based,” she said. “We are close to offering 60 varieties of soups and bone broths,” adding that she cannot open a soup restaurant at the current location but offers a large selection of grab n’ go soups and broths for sale at her Herndon kitchen.

Mardirosian carefully sources all ingredients from local farmers and produce growers. “People care about their food and where the ingredients come from,” she said. “We spend a lot of time thinking about what goes into a soup. Every ingredient matters. We don’t want to compromise.”



With her business thriving in its expanded location, Mardirosian noted that new entrepreneurs face so many pitfalls. For those planning to open a food-based business, she offers some sage advice. “Know and understand your ingredients and every cost that goes into your product,” she said. “Next, have a real passion for what you’re doing and find a great team of people who share your passion. And third, gain a level of business experience or discipline to look at the numbers and the reality of your plans or find a mentor who can help you do that.”

She pointed out that business acumen and planning helps newcomers understand that success takes time, maybe several years. “Don’t expect to make a profit right away, but at least try to cover your business costs. The food business

is a low-margin business. We are really disciplined about budgets and costs,” she said. “Some people enter into the food business as a hobby but get burned out after a few years.” But with realistic expectations, they should know that it’s possible to succeed even if it may be a longer road to travel.

In addition to the Herndon kitchen, you can find 100 Bowls of Soup at MOMs Organic Market (Arlington, Baltimore, Bowie, College Park, Frederick, Herndon, Merrifield, Rockville, Waldorf, Washington DC, White Marsh and Woodbridge), The Organic Butcher of McLean, Sweetbites Café in McLean, The Local Market in Falls Church and online via Washington’s Green Grocer and Hometown Harvest.

Mexican Tortilla Soup? Flatbread Pizza with Teriyaki Chicken? Lime-glazed Citrus Salad?

These dishes are not typically found on school lunch menus, but they might be soon! Join in on March 11 as fifteen teams from 10 Fairfax County Public Schools face off to win a spot for their inventive edible entries on the FCPS cafeteria menus. The contest takes place from 10 am to 2 pm at Lake Braddock Secondary School in Burke, Va. during the Real Food for Kids’ fifth annual Culinary Challenge and Wellness Expo. The event includes expert-led workshops and chef demonstrations, speakers, and fun for all! **To register and to learn more about Real Food for Kids, please click here: www.realfoodforkids.org.**