



Pretty Sweet Treats

Story and Photos by Rebekah Elliott

Kim Zambalis is in the business of making people happy - one chocolate-dipped, fresh fruit arrangement at a time. She's the owner of *Edible Arrangements* in Easton and it's clear upon our first meeting that she absolutely loves her job.

A first-time business owner, the bubbly, blonde-haired 30-year-old became interested in owning a part of the artfully delicious franchise several years ago after receiving several *Edible Arrangements* of her own. It was 2007, and Zambalis was working a somewhat monotonous desk job at an office in Washington, D.C., when she received the unique gift from her now-husband, Nick.

"All I remember is having a big, beaming smile on my face and walking around the office going 'look what I got.' And being able to share it with people," she says.

Wanting to trade in her humdrum secretarial job for something a little more rewarding, and having heard more and more about the fanciful fruit gifts, Zambalis and her husband decided to take a trip to Connecticut, where the Edible Arrangements' homebase is located.

"They got me pumped and they got my husband pumped to want to join the group," she says.

The subsequent decision to open her own *Edible Arrangements* branch was an easy one, Zambalis says, and selecting the ideal location for the store was even easier.

Although she could've stayed around Northern Virginia, Zambalis says she was ready for a change of scenery. She stumbled upon the Eastern Shore a few years earlier, when where she and her husband frequently took day trips to escape city life.

"My husband came back from Iraq and as part of his therapy, he bought a motorcycle and we would take drives around (the Eastern Shore) and we just fell in love with this area," she says.

So, Zambalis pitched the idea to corporate and waited for their approval. It wasn't instantaneous, she says, admitting it took some convincing on her end for corporate to see the location's potential. But, eventually, the site was approved.

Though it's been two years since the store first opened its doors, Zambalis seems just as excited about it as you'd expect an owner to be during a store's grand opening - which is surprising considering *Edible Arrangements* in Easton opened during the Great Recession.

"I knew it was going to be a struggle, but I knew it'd catch on and it did," she says, adding excitedly that revenue streams continue to grow each year. "If I can survive in the

recession, then imagine what I can do when our economic state is in better form."

On a dreary weekday morning, stepping inside *Edible Arrangements* is a welcome change. The store itself is bright and colorful, with balloons, ceramic vases, plush teddy bears and gift boxes scattered throughout. The sweet scents of fresh fruit hover in the air, as the aroma of creamy, rich chocolate drifts in from the kitchen. Zambalis jokes that, over time, she's become immune to the allure of fresh fruit and chocolate that sits daily outside of her office.

She credits her store's success in Talbot County to the delightfully uncommon nature of the business. The Easton store is one of two *Edible Arrangements* in Maryland's Eastern Shore - the other is located in Salisbury - giving Zambalis a larger pool of potential clients. Still, bringing a relatively unknown product into an area isn't the easiest venture, as Zambalis discovered soon after opening in 2010.

"I came in with a big head, coming from a city where everyone knows about the brand. But I wanted a challenge and I got one," she says, with a laugh.

Despite a national advertising campaign provided by the corporate office, Zambalis worked tirelessly to promote the product she felt so strongly about. Along with print advertisements in local publications, Zambalis used guerilla mar-



Kim Zambalis

keting tactics to introduce the Shore to the sweet fruit treats. From wedding venues to vending shows, Zambalis traveled the Eastern Shore with samples of the product to hand out to individuals. She found that once someone tasted the product, they were hooked.

Even as her business continues to soar, Zambalis remains modest about her success, refusing to let any of it go to her head. She can still be found daily in the shop doing a myriad of tasks, from dusting shelves to dipping strawberries in chocolate, harboring a smile and a positive outlook that's refreshingly sincere.

When we first meet to talk about this article, Zambalis tells me she's had a bad day in terms of sales. She refers to it as the calm before the storm - the storm being the Christmas sales season. But she soon perks up while talking about her store. In fact, within minutes of mentioning *Edible Arrangements*, Zambalis is noticeably re-energized and, she says, ready for the couple hundred orders she expects to receive over the holidays.

For the next few weeks, Zambalis and her five employees, will slice, dice and hand-dip in chocolate thousands of

pieces of pineapple, melon, apple, grape and strawberry. The daily exercise becomes so intense during this time of year, Zambalis says she has to tape her fingers as though she were a professional football player.

"We're all double-gloved, taped up and tired by the end of the day. We also build a nice collection of calluses on our fingers," she says with a chuckle.

Zambalis doesn't hide the fact that, for the moment at least, her life is work. And while there may be some struggles, it's clear she's enjoying every minute of it.

"I just have to keep the faith. If I don't succeed, I tried. I can say that I owned a business. Not a lot of people can say that. And I'm young enough that I can pick up the pieces and start over again," she says.

Not that she wants to do that, obviously, but her infectious energy and relentless tenacity prove that it's certainly something Zambalis could do.

Edible Arrangements is located at 28601 Marlboro Avenue, Suite 106, in Easton. For more information, call 410-770-5603 or visit www.ediblearrangements.com.

