



SUGAR RUSH



Small Towns Offer Big Flavor

By Katie Coffin

When my editor asked me to spend a day eating chocolate and writing about it, I had to pinch myself. Was I dreaming? I ran out of his office to get started before he could change his mind.

It may be surprising even to native Hoosiers that a quest for fine candies and pastries would include stops in Union City, Winchester and Hagerstown. However, there are hidden gems on the eastern side of the state with fascinating business histories, interactive tours and delicious products that make for a “sweet” daytrip.

Ghyslain: The art of chocolate (Union City)

Ghyslain Maurais and his wife, Susan, started Ghyslain Chocolatier in a farm house in 1998, ultimately choosing Union City (Susan’s hometown) for its current location. Today, Ghyslain’s staff of 25 produces fine French breads and pastries in addition to gourmet chocolates, and the company ships its chocolates all over the world. There are also two Ghyslain bistros in Louisville, Kentucky.

Maurais started out as an architectural student in Quebec, Canada, but changed his focus to culinary arts after enjoying a stint at a local restaurant to earn extra money. He worked at some of the finest hotels and restaurants across North America and Europe, even serving as head chef at the Quebec Government Offices in London and New York City. Chocolate and pastries are his passion, and his architectural engineering background is evident in the elaborate chocolate sculptures on display throughout the Union City store.

Leslie Brewer, inside sales and tour director, leads me through the production area, where not a single conveyor belt can be found because each chocolate and pastry is crafted by hand. Ghyslain offers a

variety of tours: basic, luncheon and even a chance to make your own chocolate. For those with culinary skills, there are day-long tours where individuals can work beside Ghyslain’s chefs.

I began my tasting “research” with an assorted box of caramels, truffles and Ghyslain’s Signature chocolates. The pieces are hand painted with brilliant colors made from cocoa butter, and each has its own name and design. Most of the products are filled with ganache, a French staple of equal parts heavy cream and fine chocolate. Each chocolate’s identity is determined by how the ganache is flavored.

One of my favorites was the Bronze Diamond, which sparkled in the sunlight. The Purple Rain flooded the senses with raspberry purée and Chambord Liqueur extract, while the self-titled Ghyslain medallion was an eclectic mix of dark chocolate ganache infused with Grand Marnier extract, dried figs, orange peel and pistachio. Needless to say, there wasn’t a bad piece in the box, and I did a little too much “research.”

“I do chuckle when people ask, ‘How do you say no (to the chocolate)?’” Brewer muses. “I guess when you are exposed to it every day, you want something you can’t have. But believe me, we get our share here.”



Each pastry and piece of chocolate is a work of art at Ghyslain Chocolatier in Union City. Products are handcrafted in vibrant colors with an edible paint made from cocoa butter. Utilizing Ghyslain Maurais’ architectural background, the company also produces ornate chocolate sculptures such as high-heel shoes, Santa Claus and even the Eiffel Tower.

Wick's Pies: Sugar 'dream' (Winchester)

Mike Wickersham, president of Wick's Pies, laughs as he remembers Illinois radio stations calling him in early 2009.

They were comparing a major focus of the Illinois legislature at the time (impeaching then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich) with a more light-hearted resolution in Indiana adopting sugar cream as the official state pie. Due to Wick's Pies largely making that flavor famous, the company's home base of Winchester also became the sugar cream pie capital.

"It's brought a lot of familiarity to the product," Wickersham remarks. "That spring, we sold three times as many sugar cream pies as we had in any previous spring. It was just a neat thing."

Wick's Pies got its start in 1944, when Wickersham's father, Duane (nicknamed "Wick"), opened a restaurant and began making pies. Fast forward about 20 years, and the company moved into its current location where it began producing and freezing pie shells and a long list of pies, including pecan, pumpkin and sugar cream. The sugar cream became so popular that Duane had to obtain a patent on the recipe to foil the efforts of a large competitor trying to steal it.

Across the street from the facility with 15,000 square feet of production space is Mrs. Wick's Pie Shop, a diner also launched by Duane that sells some of Wick's Pies and many of its own. I sat down at the counter next to long-time patron Lloyd Ertel, who was born and raised in Winchester. He's been

coming to Mrs. Wick's for 25 years.

"Here's the proof," he says, motioning to his belly with a laugh.

I alternated between talking with Ertel, who one waitress addressed as "Uncle Lloyd," and devouring a warm piece of sugar cream pie. The smooth and creamy dessert is made by a third-generation family company, and most of the ingredients come from Indiana. It's like enjoying a slice of the Hoosier state.

Abbott's Candies: Old-fashioned caramels (Hagerstown)

Abbott's Candies makes special caramels.

The caramel is cooked in a copper pot over an open flame, and each piece is hand wrapped. The process is essentially the same as it was in 1890 when W.C. Abbott began



For Hoosier pie enthusiasts (or anyone with a sweet tooth), Mrs. Wick's Pie Shop is a must. Duane "Wick" Wickersham started Wick's Pies in 1944 and opened Mrs. Wick's restaurant in 1986 with his wife, Ruby, in her honor.



Wick's Pies: By the Numbers

- Oven holds 1,500 pies at one time
- 55,000 pounds of flour used per week on average
- 450,000 cubic feet of freezer space
- Capacity to run 60,000 units (pies and pie shells) per day



A visit to Abbott's Candies feels like traveling back in time, beginning with its bright pink storefront originally constructed in 1852. The caramel is cooked in a copper pot over an open flame, the same way founder W.C. Abbott did it in 1890. Treats are finished off with a signature "A" to certify them as an Abbott's confection.



making the caramels in his garage.

Evidence of the treats' renown: Bob Hope indulged in Abbott's caramels at his 100th birthday party in 2003.

Abbott's Candies operates out of a bright pink storefront, a building originally constructed in 1852 as the Presbyterian Church, in the heart of Hagerstown.

Current president Jay Noel worked with a food supply company and had an itch to own a business. In 1993, the opportunity arose to open a second location of Abbott's Candies, one of his accounts, in Indianapolis

due to demand. Then in 2012, Noel and his wife, Lynn, purchased the Hagerstown location from the Abbott family. Most recently, Noel and the Abbott's staff were named one of the 2015 Indiana Artisans.

The store sells all different kinds of candies in decorative boxes, and a glass case sits in one corner with memorabilia documenting Abbott's Candies history. The chocolate-covered caramels are delicious. The chocolate coating melts in your mouth, and the sweet, buttery filling is thick and rich.

"Caramels are about 90% of our sales,"

Noel observes. "They're just phenomenal. I'd put them up against anybody."

'Something delicious under the surface'

The closing line of the Ghyslain Chocolatier tour video expressed my sentiments after discovering these delicacies in surprising places:

"The next time you're (passing) through a quaint little town like Union City, stop and take a look around. You just might find something delicious if you look under the surface."

RESOURCES: Leslie Brewer, Ghyslain, at www.ghyslain.com | Mike Wickersham, Wick's Pies, at www.wickspies.com | Jay Noel, Abbott's Candies, at www.abbottsalso.com