



Momma Reiner's Fudge Factory: Open for Business

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Guests at Momma Reiner's 'fudge factory' are enticed through the entryway of her Palisades home and towards the sweet, chocolaty smell coming from her sunlit kitchen.

There, the aproned Kimberly Reiner stands over an island counter dipping a long spoon into a large pot of hot fudge and dropping spoonfuls onto sheets of wax paper.

Row by row, column after column, the meringue-shaped treats accumulate on the counter, each made with the artful swirl of Reiner's hand. 'I like the dipping part,' Reiner says, smiling as she methodically finishes spooning out the batch of about 130 pieces of fudge.

Reiner has been making the chocolate delicacy for family and friends during the winter holiday season since she was about 5 years old, first with her mother, then as an adult with her own family. Now, at the suggestion of friend and Palisadian business owner Patti Black, she's selling her homemade fudge exclusively at Black Ink (873 Swarthmore) through Christmas.

'Patti inspired me [to sell],' says Reiner, who admits that while 'multiple stores' have expressed interest in carrying her fudge, she wanted 'to do things right' by introducing it at her friend's shop in town.

Reiner and Black were neighbors for years in the Las Casas/Grenola neighborhood, where Reiner still lives with her husband, Steve, and sons, Alex, 5-1/2, and Emmett, 21 months. Alex attends Calvary Christian School.

'Kimberly's been giving [the fudge] to me every Christmas and I've been telling her we should sell it,' says Black, who's been in the customized stationery business since 1998. 'It's selling great. People come in every day for samples [available at the counter].'

Reiner says that her business background helped her turn this new adventure into a viable venture. A graduate of Pepperdine Law School, she worked for five years as an immigration attorney in Los Angeles and Houston, Texas, where she and her husband moved after marrying in 1997.

Originally from Beverly Hills, Reiner put her law career on hold when Alex was born. Her Texas friends gave her the name 'Momma Reiner' because she was the first among them to have a baby. When her husband's job brought them back to L.A. in late 1999, the same friends presented her with a white apron with the nickname embroidered on it.

Even when Reiner was working as an attorney, she says she always made fudge for the holidays. 'It's innate; I can't control it. I think it brings back [childhood] memories.' She believes that the family fudge-making tradition began with her maternal grandmother, who used to make it with her daughter (Reiner's mother, Terri Aidikoff). Each generation, however, has its own method, or touch.

'[My mom] wings it more than I do,' says Reiner, who keeps suggesting that they have a 'fudge-off' to see how their fudge tastes different. 'I have to lay everything out perfectly; it's like a rhythm.'

Part of what Reiner loves about the process is that it's 'relaxing and methodical,' something she can do 'in between carpool, after-school play dates and soccer.' Her kids are the taste-testers once a batch has been made, which takes about an hour, not including the approximately four hours she allows for the fudge to sit.

'I always knew I wanted to start a business,' Reiner says. 'It was either start a fudge business or go back to law, and that's still on the back burner.'

The natural evolution of what she refers to as her 'cottage industry' is part of what she believes makes her fudge so special. 'I think my label says it all: 'Homemade in a little kitchen on a little street in a little village by the sea.'"

While she won't reveal the 'secret recipe,' Reiner does say that the fudge has to boil at a high temperature and has to be the proper consistency before it's shaped into pieces and set out to dry.

At the present time, Reiner is only selling semisweet chocolate fudge 'to keep it simple,' but she's already experimenting with a butterscotch recipe and plans to have three different chocolate combinations: nuts, coconut and Grand Marnier or Kahlua.

The sweet treats are available for immediate purchase, in either a pint-sized box with between 11 and 15 pieces (\$15) or a smaller box with three to four pieces (\$5), and can be ordered for larger events.

'It's heartwarming and evokes the holiday spirit,' Reiner says, explaining that each year, she and her son, Alex, drive around and drop fudge off at the homes of family and friends, with Alex acting as the elf. 'I hope I don't get too busy, so I can still continue the holiday tradition with my son.'

If the business grows too big for her kitchen, Reiner says she will move it to a commercial kitchen. 'Ultimately, I'd like to have a store,' she says. 'As it gets bigger, it will become more structured, but now I'm just having fun.'

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