

# Front & Back of the House

## It's All About the Chocolate

By Gael Hees

*Gael Hees is a Las Vegas freelancer, specializing in written, graphic and audiovisual communications. She has written for national publications and has won numerous awards for tourism-related printed materials and videos, is accredited in public relations by the Public Relations Society of America and is a certified hospitality educator. gael.hees@icloud.com*



Denise and Levi Elrod have been cooking together since their very beginning when they met while working as chefs in a chocolate shop in Florida. Just like in a fairy tale, they found themselves loving each other, sharing a love for chocolate and wanting to own a business of their own.

“We just hit it off,” said Denise. “We worked together every single second of every single day. A lot of people couldn’t handle that, but we loved being around each other and that’s why we knew we would be successful if we started a company together.”

Five years later, the couple owns ChocolateBuzzz, a chocolate shop offering bonbons, turtles, barks and other confections that have their customers raving. “Amazing! Just the right amount of salty,” Stephanie said of the Pink Himalayan bonbon. “Just like a candy cane wrapped in chocolate—the spiciness of the candy cane comes out, balanced with the chocolate,” said Randy of the peppermint bark. “I could happily eat an entire box,” Stephanie waxed gluttonous over the turtles. “Too good,” said Natalie.

Customers often speak about the “balance” of the candies. They refer to the balance between crunch and goo, the balance between sweet and salty, the balance between flavors that gives a piece that special wow moment.

Balance is very important to Denise and Levi, not just in their products, but in their lives as well. They have carefully crafted a model for their business that allows them to move gracefully through the challenges of a young business, an even younger baby and leading lives filled with family and friends, exercise and spending time together.

ChocolateBuzzz has no storefront. This means that the owners aren’t tied to a location or monthly rent. “We want to keep our costs low, so our customers pay for the quality of the product, not square feet,” Denise said.

The turtles, bonbons, peppermint bark and other items can be found at farmers markets and online. Denise ships and will even personally deliver ChocolateBuzzz products to a home or office for an order of \$100 or more. The Elrods are also experimenting with a wholesale arrangement with Gifted in Boca Park, and have been approached by several other storeowners interested in carrying their products.

The cooking is all done in a shared-use commercial kitchen called Vida Kitchens. They rent the cooking area by the hour, usually at night, when sitters are available and Levi isn’t working at his job as manager of a 24-Hour Fitness location. They didn’t make a huge investment in equipment and the “rent” is tied directly to the making of the product.

The company spends its money on chocolate. “We use Valrhona and Cacao Barry, the highest quality chocolate you can buy,” Denise said. “I already knew what the best was, and I picked the best before we even started the company.”

The second most important ingredient is vanilla. According to Denise, there’s a lot of vanilla in bonbons and again, they use the best: Nielsen-Massey. Flavorings include the essential oils of peppermint and ginger from Doterra, and real candy canes, among others. “We tried using a peppermint extract, but it leaves a chemical taste,” said Denise. “We use the ginger essential oil in the ginger spice caramel with the ginger infusion, to give it another pop of ginger.”

With ingredients on hand, the cooking begins. Levi is good with the flavor combinations, and cooks the ganaches and caramels, plus he is the genius behind the company’s stunning packaging. Denise brings her skills to the fore with the aesthetics for the chocolates themselves, creating the smooth, colorful shells for the bonbons, and many of their custom designs for events and company marketing.

ChocolateBuzzz is completing its third year and is looking to 2019 to be their best year yet as the company continues to grow and thrive. Through careful planning, they have created a business many years earlier than they would have ever thought possible. They’ve found a good balance—in the tastes and textures of their products and in their lives.

Author’s note: I have a confession. I don’t like chocolate, it doesn’t cross my lips. I’ve been called not human and accused of being an alien because of this. To write this article I obtained chocolates from Denise and shared them with family members—my husband Randy, his daughter Stephanie and my daughter, Natalie. They LOVED them. And I can tell you that they’re really beautiful and have great packaging. However, you should probably try them yourself. That way you’ll know for sure...

For more information, or to order, visit [chocolatebuzzz.com](http://chocolatebuzzz.com).



photos courtesy ChocolateBuzzz

