

# 'CRAZY GOOD'

recipes, high expectations

By VICKI BENNINGTON

**D**ee Gehrs of Godfrey found herself searching for a new career with more flexibility after having her son a few years ago.

With a background in advertising, she began taking stock of her knowledge and talent base, considering other things she knew she was good at like cooking. She also knew from her sister, a pharmaceutical representative, that it's important to have a captive audience when presenting new products.

"I did a lot of research and

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**DEE GEHRS**

Homestyle Gourmet Inc.

thought there might be a niche for putting together luncheons for pharmaceutical reps at physician's offices," Gehrs said.

It seemed to be a great way to have a fairly steady clientele on a Monday through Friday basis. Though she was a little "white-knuckled" for the first six months as her base was growing, in the end it paid off. It wasn't long before she was catering lunches in doctor's offices on both sides of the river.

"It turned into a pretty good gig," she said of her business Homestyle Gourmet. "Through mostly word-of-mouth, the business began to grow."

The first six weeks or so she

## A DAY in the life

All women work. From staying home to raise a family and care for a household to crunching numbers in an office, women work in all walks of life and commerce. Take a look at the life of a different working woman.

This month:  
**Caterer, Dee Gehrs**

flaire/JIM BOWLING

Dee Gehrs of Godfrey owns and operates the catering company, Homestyle Gourmet. Favorite items on the menu are "Better Than Sex" cake and "crazy good" soups.

worked late hours all by herself and thought everything had to be made from scratch.

"But I found out through trial and error that there are some things I'm definitely the best at that I still do make from scratch, but I realized I didn't have to make everything myself," she said.

Other businesses began to call for corporate lunches and holiday parties, and she hired several additional employees and expanded her business to include a full-service commercial kitchen big enough to accommodate growing orders. And it also meant she was around more for her son.

So what's the key to her success?

"I have a good menu and a good, strong product," she said. "We set a very high bar as far as client expectations. Customer service and satisfaction are everything."

Certain items in particular are popular favorites. "Better Than Sex" cake with Gehrs' own twist



to the recipe is always a hit. Her specialties range from "crazy good" soups to fresh salads with homemade poppy seed dressing, chicken and beef spedini, and she loves to make Italian and Mexican dishes.

Homestyle Gourmet drops off luncheons (or even breakfasts) and sets up buffets where and how the client desires.

She keeps good records on all of her clients making it easier when shopping for supplies and preparing for those who are steady customers as well as newcomers. She's come to know what she is likely to run out of — so it doesn't happen.

Though she has mostly con-

centrated on corporate and professional daytime meals, in recent months, especially as her son is getting older, Gehrs has been expanding in response to more and more calls for fund-raisers, church dinners, political gatherings and wedding receptions.

"I love doing creative things and weddings and evening functions give me a chance to really do something different," Gehrs said. "But I still nurture the original core luncheon business that I started with."

She even catered her own milestone birthday party and tried a few new things to see how they

## Caterer

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would go over.

“We put up a large food tent in the backyard, and I had a huge sweets station with a cupcake topiary and a gourmet coffee bar,” she said. “It was wonderful.”

Gehrs said she also caters house parties (birthdays, graduations, other special occasions) for a minimum group of 10, that have been successful. Customized service is offered at several levels (for all events) including white glove with a per hour/per person charge.

“People are so happy that they can just relax and enjoy their own party,” she said. “They don’t have to worry about the food or service.”

The Homestyle Gourmet basic menu includes a full range of sandwiches, salads, soups, appetizers and buffet items like chicken or beef kabobs, fried chicken, turkey, pasta dishes and grilled hamburgers. Or as Gehrs said, if

you would like to “take it up a notch,” specialty items like fillet mignon, butterfly shrimp or tenderloin tips are also offered.

**For more  
information or  
to book an event,  
call  
(618) 466-7500.**

In June, Homestyle Gourmet catered a large wedding at one of Alton’s most prestigious and historical homes in Fairmont Subdivision. A drink station and appetizers welcomed guests and warded off hunger pains until it was time for the full buffet with a choice of meats and sides. Gehrs said her company also catered a casual rehearsal dinner the night before — served almost “picnic” style with Italian beef and various side dishes.