

Olathe accelerator jump-starts success for Three Bears Bakery & BBQ

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One of the offerings at Three Bears Bakery & BBQ is this German chocolate cake.

What began as a quest to eat healthier has morphed into a full-fledged business for husband-and-wife team Jabin and Natalie. And the [Food Innovation Accelerator at Kansas State University Olathe](#) played a key role, giving the couple access to commercial-grade kitchens and equipment that meet FDA and state requirements.

"It's really helped us accelerate our growth," Jabin Olds said.

Their Olathe business, [Three Bears Bakery & BBQ](#), launched in March 2019 and has expanded from three products to more than 40. This year's sales are up 74%, and to date, the company has shipped to 46 states. Its lineup includes keto-friendly and low-carb goods, such as monkey bread, hamburger buns, butter pecan blondies, chocolate peppermint cookies and butterbeer cake. It also features savory items, from nuts to barbecue sauce to a barbecue rub. In the future, it plans to expand its barbecue lineup.

For now, its items can be found online on its website and also at the Lenexa farmer's market. It also has a few wholesale accounts, including restaurants, coffee shops and independent retailers. Three Bears is hungry for expansion, however, and is on the hunt for a wholesale and retail space of its own. The Olds are in negotiations and aim to move into a space early next year.



Husband-and-wife team Jabin (left) and Natalie Olds are founders of Olathe-based Three Bears Bakery & BBQ, which offers a variety of keto-friendly and low carb items. Pictured are the Olds with their son, Perry.

Starting out

In 2017, the Olds challenged themselves to eat healthier and started the keto diet. Leveraging his bakery science and management degree, Jabin Olds began experimenting and crafting recipes that satisfied their sweet tooth but also were keto-friendly. In 2019, they created a [Facebook page](#) and launched a bake sale for friends and family. In less than two hours, they had 30 orders from people they didn't know, Natalie Olds said. In less than a week, the page garnered 200 followers and the couple realized they were onto something.

When Jabin Olds lost his job, it gave them the push to start focusing on their craft full time.

"If this wasn't the door opening, I don't know what else was," she said.

The venture hasn't been without its ups and downs, however, Jabin Olds said.

"There's no going home and complaining about your co-worker," she said. "We're learning a lot about each other. It's a whole different level because now we're co-workers, we're co-owners, we're spouses, we're parents and all of those are different. But in our life, it's all the same right now. Trying to separate those items and when to separate them has been a challenge. But I think it's been very beneficial for our marriage. We understand each other better now. We communicate better now because everything depends on this communication."



Three Bears Bakery & BBQ's bun is the perfect addition to this ham and havarti sandwich.

Leveraging the accelerator

The Olds started using the Food Innovation Accelerator's facilities when they began selling at the Lenexa farmer's market, which requires goods to be produced in a commercial facility.

The accelerator, which is funded through the [Johnson County Education Research Triangle \(JCERT\)](#) 1/8-cent sales tax, provides educational expertise and access to five kitchens, storage and commercial equipment, such as food processors, fryers and ovens.

Having access to the facility helped the Olds scale operations and also figure out the equipment they'd need in their own space, she said.

When the couple started at the facility, they were baking 16 to 20 loaves and six to seven dozen cookies in a day, said [Bryan Severns](#), who oversees the accelerator and is manager of food programs and services at K-State Olathe. Now they're producing 90 to 100 loaves and 15 to 25 dozen baked goods a day, he said.

"They've learned to work with the machinery here to maximize their efforts and we play a hand with that, working with temperature on the ovens and working with formulation a little bit," Severns said.

The accelerator has worked with a variety of food startups and has helped entrepreneurs develop more efficient processes and tweak recipes to work for large-scale production. He likes seeing startups graduate from the space, which reminds him of his days as a chef.

"As a chef, it was very satisfying to have people start off in my kitchens, work their way up and be in demand in other places," Severns said. "Part of my job as a chef is to mentor and train people to be able to work anywhere in the industry. So this fits right with that. We want to be one of the go-to economic drivers for the startup or entrepreneurial industry in the Kansas City region. On a broader scale, we want to be a model for one way to succeed as a shared-use kitchen."



Leslie Collins, Staff Writer