

# Food entrepreneurs in Florida start from scratch

## Gulf Coast Sourdough & Wild Yeast Breads

ELIZABETH TAYLOR | TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 2016

SHARE [f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [e](#)



Photos courtesy of Gulf Coast Sourdough & Wild Yeast Breads.



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



Ever dream that your grandpa's signature hot sauce might be your recipe for success? While starting any business is no easy task, becoming a food entrepreneur is a special challenge. Find out what makes a food-based venture cook with lessons from some of our most recent Tampa Bay startups.

*Second in a series*

**Fresh concept:** Small batch artisan bakery specializing in sourdough and wild yeast breads, sold at farmer's markets and specialty food stores in the Tampa Bay area.

**The dish:** Relocating to Florida in the heat of summer. Starting a bakery business without prior experience in the food industry. Each is a daunting move in itself. So imagine the guts it would take to do both at the same time.

"It was definitely a leap of faith for us," says Christina Cann, who moved from Pittsburgh with her husband, Brett Wiewiora, to start a business based on his longtime passion for baking sourdough bread. Add their toddler to the mix and, yes, "it took a full amount of courage for

ADVERTISEMENT



### TOP STORIES

Local leaders look ahead at what Brightline expansion can mean for Tampa, Ybor

10 Tampa Bay projects to watch in 2024

Clearwater's vision for housing

sure.”

It was actually daughter Julia, now 3, who was a major motivation for the decision to leave their jobs and do something completely different, even though both have master’s degrees in public policy and management.

“She was a big impetus, because we wanted to do something where we could all be together as a family,” says Christina, adding that visitors to their booth at markets will usually see little Julia playing in her castle tent.

**Why Tampa?** The idea started when Christina’s family migrated to Riverview. Then the couple saw an opportunity here that didn’t exist in Pittsburgh.

“One of the things that really drew us to Tampa is the farmer’s market culture. In Pittsburgh, you have just a three- to four-month window with the weather,” says Christina. With some Tampa area markets open year-round, “that enabled us to focus on this as a full-time venture vs. just part-time in the summer.”

**Why sourdough?** An avid baker since his teens, Brett became keenly interested in sourdough breads, which are made from wild yeast instead of the commercial yeast that comes from a store. The sourdough process -- which is how all breads were made until commercial yeast became available about 100 years ago -- begins with a “starter” by mixing flour and water in a jar and leaving it on the counter, Christina explains. After a couple of days, wild yeast starts colonizing. Over time, “you have to feed it and take care of it and it provides the base for the distinctive sour taste that people love in sourdough,” she says. “We created our starter about five years ago.”

**Fresh concept: Small batch artisan bakery specializing in sourdough and wild yeast breads, sold at farmer’s markets and specialty food stores in the Tampa Bay area.**

One interesting characteristic of the wild yeast in a sourdough starter is it will change and take on new flavors based on the location. “When you move, the local yeast takes over. We actually had to adjust some of our recipes because it takes longer here to bring out the sour flavor that everyone loves,” Christina says.

Equipped with an eclectic mix of traditional sourdough and sweetbread recipes, the couple made their debut on July 4, 2015. “Independence Day seemed the perfect time to start our own business,” says Christina.

So far, taking that double leap to move to Florida and start a bread business has proven worth the risk. Based on their business plan, they’ve met or exceeded their goals, says Christina. “We’re right on the cusp” of the business fully supporting them after relying on savings to get started. “That’s pretty impressive since we just launched last year. We’re both in it together, going full throttle. We’re very encouraged and heartened by the support and loyal customers.”

**Marketing strategy:** Beginning with one community market, [Gulf Coast Sourdough & Wild Yeast Breads](#) quickly expanded to participate in five markets in addition to landing shelf space at three Tampa specialty grocery stores. Despite being new to the area, they’ve built a strong following on Facebook and happily give tips to sourdough fans interested in baking their own bread. This is paying off through Brett’s popular sourdough baking classes at the [Rolling Pin Kitchen Emporium](#) in Brandon.

**What’s on the menu:** The top-seller is Babka, an Eastern European dessert bread made from brioche dough with chocolate cinnamon swirls and streusel on top. Other sweets include a Cinnamon Swirl Loaf and Cinnamon Rolls. Two recipes celebrate their new Florida home: The Sand Dollar Sourdough, a traditional round loaf topped with a distinctive pattern that earns its

affordability takes teamwork at the top

Masthead gallery: Share the Story

University Area CDC strengthens North Tampa community through Harvest Hope Park, attainable housing

Nonprofit Saving Our Seniors expands its impact with new Produce Pac program

Sights and scenes as the 10th Tampa Pride Diversity Parade rolls through Ybor City

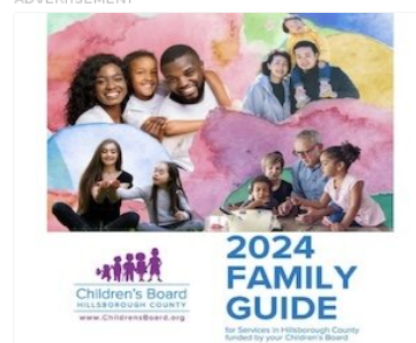
Tampa Bay student photography competition honors memory of former Hillel Academy student

The Centre for Women enhances leadership training and development efforts with webinar series

A conversation with St. Pete urban and author Peter Kageyama

[VIEW ALL STORIES](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT

name, and the Beach Baguette, a multigrain packed with walnuts, sunflower seeds and flaxseeds. View the full lineup at [GulfCoastSourdough.com](http://GulfCoastSourdough.com).

**Where to buy:** Available daily at Bayshore Market in the Ballast Point neighborhood and two [Duckweed Urban Market](#) locations in downtown Tampa and Channelside, Gulf Coast Sourdough is on hand every Saturday at either the [Fresh Market at Wiregrass](#) in Wesley Chapel in Pasco County or [Ybor City Saturday Market](#) in Tampa. Check their Facebook page for their full market schedule.

**The next course:** The couple has plans to expand soon by selling at more store locations and possibly restaurants. Long range, they'd like to use their education in social enterprise to develop a concept for bread based on the community supported agriculture (CSA) model, which has become a popular way for customers to buy local, seasonal food directly from farmers through memberships or shares.

**Food for thought:** If you're thinking about launching a food venture, then "go for it, because there's a lot of great support here," says Christina. "Keep an open mind, think about the connections you can make, look for collaborative opportunities and cultivate those relationships." For example, she says Kristin Kitts, owner of [Your Pro Kitchen](#) in south Tampa, where they rent commercial kitchen space, has helped them with practical advice as well as networking and introductions to potential wholesale clients.

*83 Degrees Media's series on foodie entrepreneurs:*

[Jon's Gourmet Products](#)

[Gulf Coast Sourdough & Wild Yeast Breads](#)

[Eat Fresco Foods](#)

[Le'Anns Cheesecakes 'N More](#)

