

Baked With Love

Affordable and delicious cannabis cookies are on the menu at this Ottawa-based couple's business. Here's the story behind Slow Ride Bakery's entrance into the cannabis space.

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A multi-billion-dollar industry on the rise, cannabis can be a hugely competitive and intimidating industry to navigate. That said, Karen and Vik Dhawan from Ottawa are coming out on top. The husband-and-wife dream duo are uniquely poised to be one of the first on the market with their craft cannabis cookies.

For Karen, February 2021 marked the 20-year anniversary of a horrific car accident that damaged her spinal cord and left her with chronic pain. After years

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early stages. They had been (unofficially but consensually) testing batches of cookies on Vik's colleagues for years and knew what worked. During this time, Karen was dismayed by the number of people mentioning they hadn't had home-baked cookies in years and wanted to get her quality cookies out to Canadians. "I'm not shying away from the fact that we are going to be using corn syrup, butter, and shortening in our cookies because that's what grandma used to have in her pantry and that's just what tastes the best! You're not buying a double-chocolate cookie for health benefits. If you're going to indulge in some THC, indulge in some tasty fats at the same time," she says.

The Dhawans looked at the Ontario Cannabis Store (OCS) and saw an opportunity. There were plenty of edibles in the form of gummies and chocolate, but when it came to baked goods, there was only a single cookie on the market — a two-pack that retails for around \$15. Vik says they're hoping to sell theirs for under \$4. "We want to be competitive with Starbucks — that's our benchmark."

Their 1,200-square-foot manufacturing facility is up against some cannabis enterprise giants, but the couple see the strength in their small size. "We're only two people, but we're also cannabis users. We understand what the consumer wants because we're consumers too, and that's not necessarily true for some companies. With quite a few large companies out there, it seems as though some don't have a lot of respect for the consumer and they're not in the business for them," says Karen. "I think the Canadian cannabis consumer is aware of that, and I think COVID-19 has probably brought that even more to the forefront. The average consumer wants to help out the smaller businesses; they want to be there for their neighbour."

Being owned and not backed by big investors, the road to market has been long and arduous. As Karen says, "you have to have everything built up and ready to go before Health Canada will issue you anything." Understandably, Vik says, "nothing beats the feeling of getting our Health Canada license. It was basically two years' culmination and the months in between where you're just waiting to hear back. It can get to you. So that sense of relief — I can't define it."

It took the couple six months to find a bank that was willing to work with a cannabis company, which held up securing a lease and attaining articles of incorporation. In the summer of 2019, they were hours away from signing a lease when they were notified that the City of Ottawa had issued a new zoning by-law for cannabis production and suddenly, they were back to the drawing board. They ended up securing their location in November 2019 and have held the lease while waiting for the final go-ahead. As parents of two, they have had their share of trials amid late nights working at the bakery and COVID-induced homeschooling.



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These challenges aside, the couple has also faced scrutiny for their career choice. "The stigma is still out there," says Karen. "Honestly, starting this

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continuously handmade our cookies with love and get them out to Canadians as much as we can. That's our main goal."

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Cannabis Culture

Durham Region

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People



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As an event specialist, Kailee leads the planning and execution of TechEx, Durham Region's Startup Grind, AVIN and represents Spark Centre at community events. In her spare time, Kailee loves to hike, camp and is an avid thrifter.



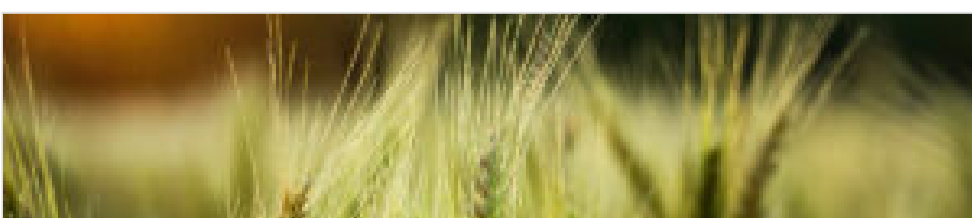
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