



## SBDC Success Story

# Cookies by Design

Franchise owner Prue Lotharius employs three generations of family members at her gifting business

Prue Lotharius and her husband purchased Cookies by Design in April 2021 as a fun side business for their family. One of 60 Cookies by Design franchises nationwide, the Lotharius family has worked to turn it into a high-volume business, moving to larger, more visible storefront at 518 River Place in Monona and focusing on business-to-business (B2B) sales.

“An aspect of the job we all appreciate is that we don’t just make cookies and cupcakes, we are a gifting business that is delivering a message in a unique way,” she says. “No matter what the occasion, every order is important to someone, which makes it important to us. Taking an order sometimes lasts 40 minutes on

the phone because it’s not just an order, it’s a story—a piece of someone’s life they are sharing. I had no idea this would be part of the job, and it’s a very rewarding aspect.”

In the early spring of 2021, when Lotharius was in the process of buying Cookies by Design, her parents recommended contacting the UW-Madison SBDC. Lotharius reached out and connected with SBDC Business Consultant Amy Bruner Zimmerman.

“I was surprised by how much knowledge the SBDC was willing to give,” says Lotharius. “Amy was great. She knew so much, sent over all the resources I needed, and was willing to go at my pace.”

In Lotharius’ case, that pace was fast. The two met twice a week, and Lotharius absorbed Zimmerman’s recommendations.

“Amy helped me through purchasing the business and saved us thousands on equipment,” Lotharius says. “When I have a big business decision to make, I reach out to her.”



Business picked up during the Easter season, and Lotharius learned quickly that the bakery needed her full attention. “We thought we could keep our corporate careers and run a bakery as a side gig, which proved to be impossible,” she says. “Leaving the corporate life during COVID was the change my family needed, for multiple reasons, so I threw myself into a challenge I honestly never thought I’d have the guts to do - running my own business.”

Previously, Lotharius was the director of marketing at WPS. She says she takes more pride in and has more passion for her family business.

“We now have seven amazing part-time employees besides me, which include our two daughters and my mother-in-law, making up three generations who work at the store,” Lotharius says. “It’s a fun place to work; we each bring a different dynamic and set of skills to the workplace.”

Lotharius says she’s using every skill she learned during her MBA program and knows she has more to learn, so she

plans to take some of the free courses the SBDC offers.

“[Moving to a new space is] a huge project and so much fun,” she says. “I’m doing it all, so I need to focus on operations, get a manager in place, and then I can take courses, pick apart the business, and establish new processes and operations. We’re definitely in the black and doing well, so I can now think about what’s next.”

She did make the time to attend Cookies by Design’s “Cookie College” for franchise owners.

“I now work with my hands daily, am on the front line with customers, and need to be the janitor, accountant, and HR, while implementing growth strategies and staying abreast of design and technique trends,” she says. “I have a lot that I’m still learning and will always be continuing to learn and improve upon.”

“We just went through a great rebrand that corporate handled, and they handle our packaging—we buy it from them, and many of our standard recipes,” says Lotharius.

“Also, a lot of us franchisees are really close and share ideas.”

To support the local community, Lotharius hires and mentors student interns in marketing roles at Cookies by Design, and the company sets up booths at local events and donate proceeds to local organizations. The bakery also sponsors local youth sports.

“We never say no to donating a cookie bouquet to a fundraiser,” Lotharius says.

To learn more about this success story, visit [sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/](https://sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/success-stories/)

The UW-Madison Small Business Development Center supports businesses in Dane, Sauk, and Columbia Counties.



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~Prue Lotharius, franchise owner, Cookies by Design