

# Business Beat

## Homemade bread mix a snap

By ALEX NEWMAN  
Although there's nothing quite like the smell wafting through the house, homemade bread is essentially a thing of the past. Most people simply don't have the time. Two Unionville homemakers, Blythe Wells and Sharron Hart,

decided to capitalize on that fact. The idea was quite simple — package a mix that required no kneading (which causes the yeast to rise) and therefore, reduce the time to prepare. The result was the Unionville Beerbread Company. Co-inventor Wells says prepa-

ration time is just two minutes. Since yeast acts as the rising agent and is a property of beer, all that's required is to add a bottle of lager to the mix, stir, and pour into a pan. No substitutes will do — no stout or ale, else the bread won't rise. After an hour in the oven, "you

have a warm loaf of bread and a wonderful aroma as well." Wells and Hart share responsibilities: "We work out of Sharron's house because her basement is finished, and all communication is done via phone, while we take care of our respective households."

Hart does the packing, shipping, and receiving, while Wells does the marketing, packaging, promotions and advertising. Those partnership roles just happened because Hart, with two small children, preferred to work solely out of the house, while Wells with just one pre-schooler, was freer to make sales calls. "I know the product is good," says Wells, "but frankly I'm amazed at our success." The company started operations last June and to date have stocked inventory in numerous deli and specialty shops in Unionville, Markham, Uxbridge, Stouffville, Kleinburg, and Claremont.

More recently, the bread mix has been sold to retailers in Oakville and London, Alberta, B.C., and Saskatchewan.

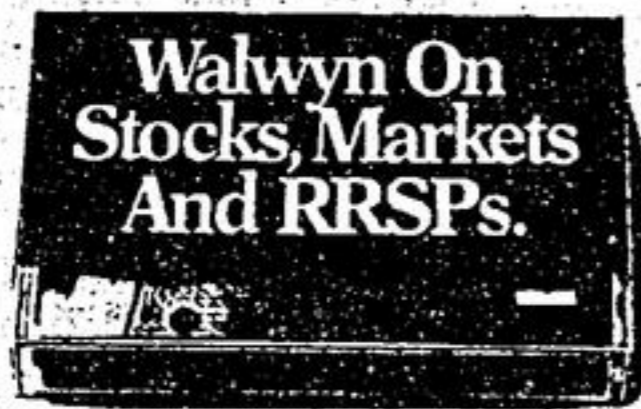
"Again, I can't believe the response in these places, especially when the bread has the name of some other town on it," says Wells, who hopes Unionville continues to sound quaint to purchasers.

So far, the product has met with no "hard sells" as Wells puts it. "We knock on the door, ask the retailer if they want to stock the mix, and they have usually



The Unionville Beerbread Company has been marketing a bread mix that uses lager beer to make the dough rise.

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agreed." When the store wants to re-order, they phone Wells' home — she doesn't need to make repeat sales calls.

Wells admits that if Unionville Beerbread Company were "just another bakery, chances are retailers wouldn't take our product. They simply don't have room on the shelves for another person's bread."

Wells and Hart also realize their limitations. "We could never compete with existing bakeries if we made the loaf ourselves."

At \$2.99, the package, which makes one loaf, is more expensive than the average price of a loaf of bread, especially if you add the cost of a bottle of beer.

The company's overhead is low — they use the basement of one home, had no initial capital outlay for ovens or space, and don't spend hours baking.

Whether by happenstance or innate and sound business sense, what Unionville Beerbread Co. offers is emotion — the chance to be a good homemaker, make your own bread, and fill the house with wonderful smells — without the time commitment or fuss.

"I guess we tapped onto those people who like to bake bread, but don't have the time."

Christmas sales were phenomenal. "A lot of bags were purchased as stocking stuffers, hostess gifts, housewarming gifts," she says. With all that business, though, Sharron was up to her "elbows in bagging."

The biggest coup of Unionville Beerbread Co.'s short eight month life, however came when they captured a large market in Labatt's Breweries. As Wells tells it, that was also an easy sell. "The girls who distributes in London and Oakville for us is married to a Labatt's rep. We were talking one day and he sug-

gested I call a woman at Labatt's in promotions." The deal turned out to be mutually beneficial, since the mix requires beer.

Labatt's not only purchased 3,000 bags of mix for their own stocking stuffers and gift boxes, they subsidized the entire promotional campaign.

Press releases were distributed to TV and print media. Again, Wells is amazed. "I am really impressed. For such a large company, they really seem to consider the little guy."

Since January is traditionally a slow month, Unionville Beerbread Co. has been working on a new product line. It's Pancake mix, to which you add coolers, and makes the gourmet kind of pancake topped with whipped cream, rather than syrup. "The cooler's carbonation makes the batter really frothy and light," explains Wells. "Plus the pretzels, and batter (good for coating shrimp, fish, chicken, and zucchini) are almost ready for the market. An onion bread mix has been added to the two other flavors — cinnamon and herb.

The Company is looking at expansion: "We will have to look at it, but right now, without a lot of orders, it's a big commitment to get retail space."

With a booth in the Canadian Fine Food Show at the airport in June, Wells hopes the new products will attract a lot of retail attention.

Neither Wells, who has been a model since age 13, nor Hart, who is a registered nurse, had any prior knowledge of baking or the food industry. "I simply can't account for it," Wells shakes her head happily. "And though the money's been channelled back into the business, we've been making money too."

IN THE MATTER OF THE ONTARIO HERITAGE, R.S.O. 1980, CHAPTER 337

AND IN THE MATTER OF THE LANDS AND PREMISES AT THE NORTH EAST CORNER OF 16th AVENUE AND WOODBINE AVENUE, BEING PART OF LOT 16, CONCESSION 4, IN THE TOWN OF MARKHAM.

**NOTICE OF INTENTION**

TAKE NOTICE THAT the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Markham intends to repeal that part of By-law Number 307-83 passed by Council on the 22nd day of November, 1983 designating the John Calvert House (The Village Forge) at the north east corner of 16th Avenue and Woodbine Avenue, Part of Lot 16, Concession 4, as a property having historic and/or architectural value or interest under the provisions of The Ontario Heritage Act; Short Statement of the Reasons for Repealing Designation:

The Region of York will be installing traffic signals and realigning the intersection of 16th Avenue and Woodbine Avenue which will require the existing section of 16th Avenue on the east side of Woodbine Avenue to be reconstructed north of its present location to align with that portion of 16th Avenue on the west side of Woodbine Avenue. The reconstruction of this intersection would require the John Calvert House (The Village Forge) to be demolished.

In order to protect the John Calvert House from demolition and to preserve its continued identity with the Hamlet of Buttonville, it is the intention of the Town to relocate the house on the property at the south west corner of the 16th Avenue and Woodbine Avenue and to redesignate it as a property having architectural value or interest in the Town of Markham under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Following the relocation of the John Calvert House (The Village Forge) to the south west corner of 16th Avenue and Woodbine Avenue, a by-law will be passed to designate the property under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act.

NOTICE OF OBJECTION to the intention of the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Markham to repeal that part of By-law Number 307-83, designating the John Calvert House (The Village Forge) at the north west corner of 16th Avenue and Woodbine Avenue under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act, may be served on the Town Clerk within thirty (30) days after the 20th day of January, 1988.

DATED at the Town of Markham this 12th day of January, 1988.

Gary F. Roseblade, C.M.O., C.M.C.  
Town Clerk  
Published a first time the 20th day of January, 1988.

**MARKHAM**