

Business

A cheesy situation

After keeping goats as pets for years, Warwick couple now selling goat cheese

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By GRETCHEN METZ, Staff Writer

WARWICK — Debbie Mikulak doesn't wish her friends a great day; she has something much better in mind. She would like everyone to "have a goat day."

The happy sentiment is on her answering machine and in her lifestyle.

Mikulak, 60, and her husband, Fred Bloom, own and operate Amazing Acres Goat Dairy, a little five-acre farm on Grove Road, a short jog south of Route 23, that produces goat cheese.

"I love goats," said Mikulak, who has had goats since she was 7 years old.

Her mother, who grew up in participating in 4-H on a dairy farm, wanted her daughter to have the 4-H experience as well, and bought her a goat, Mikulak explained.

After years of keeping goats as pets, Mikulak, and the recently retired Bloom, decided it was time to make some money on their four-legged charges.

The couple moved to Amazing Acres six years ago. To meet state and county health department regulations, they put an addition on the barn to facilitate a milking room and added a cheese-making room in the garage, complete with new stainless-steel pasteurization and cheese-making equipment imported from the Netherlands.

The set-up did not come cheap. The couple spent \$100,000 in renovations and equipment, said Mikulak.

Mikulak milks the goats at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. daily and makes cheese twice a week. The process takes four days, so on Sunday she doubles up, starting one batch and finishing another.

She also works full time for Austill's Rehabilitation Services in West Whitehall, a company that provides ed

ucational and rehabilitative therapists in schools and early intervention programs for children's hospitals, home-health agencies, outpatient clinics and skilled nursing facilities and retirement homes. Mikulak does the placement for schools.

"They've been supportive of me," Mikulak said of her employer, which has allowed her a flexible schedule so she could be home at a reasonable time to complete her barn activities on weeknights.

Amazing Acres produces fromagina, a ricotta-style goat cheese; crottin, a French-style 10-day-aged fresh goat cheese; and 10 flavors of chevre, including dill, pumpkin spice and rosemary lemon. The fromagina is packaged in a

biodegradable container made of corn.

Bloom is running the retail end of the business, taking the cheeses to farmers markets, restaurants and health food stores including Kimberton Whole Foods, Talula's Table in Kennett Square, the 320 Market Cafe in Swarthmore, Pearl's Market in Upper Uwchlan, Frecon Farm in Boyertown, Anselma Mill Farmers Market and Vollmecke Farm in West Brandywine.

Bloom, 73, said he didn't go into the goat cheese business to get rich, but rather to produce "good, healthy, local cheese." Mikulak said she and her husband are keeping the prices low on their cheese so that more people can enjoy the flavors.

The couple launched their goat cheese business in May.

Mikulak and Bloom are starting off modestly, with 18 goats. Of those, four are wethers, or castrated males, and 14 are females. All but one are Nubians, a dairy breed known for mild-tasting milk as well as their social temperament, elongated ears and sleek body.

The other goat is alpine, named Kiss because of her resemblance to Gene Simmons, lead vocalist and bass player for the hard-rock band Kiss.

The Nubians have names like Willow, Bell, Flossie, Heidi and Alice Cooper, named because she screamed like the heavy metal rock singer.

With the hefty investment of money and time, does Mikulak have any complaints, or is there is anything Mikulak does not like about goats?

"Nope," she said.

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