

Think pink

Panera Bread seeks to raise awareness of breast cancer by selling bagels shaped like pink ribbons throughout October.

BY VICTORIA D. WILLIAMS

In observance of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Panera Bread locations across the nation are selling pink-ribbon-shaped bagels throughout October. Each one costs 96 cents including tax, with 25 cents of each sale going toward an organization that helps bring awareness to breast cancer.

In Oklahoma, the proceeds go to Project Woman Coalition, an organization that helps low-income and uninsured women gain access to breast-care screening. Gov. Brad Henry has even declared October as Pink Ribbon Bagel Month.

Talk about the dough making some dough.

"These bagels are wonderful because they are connecting women through something tangible and nourishing," said Pam Scott, executive director of Project Woman Coalition. "And this year, we are really brought together by the shape of the bagel."

The Pink Ribbon Bagel isn't the initiative of a Panera marketing campaign. It all goes back to the grassroots efforts of a franchise owner in northeastern Oklahoma.

Not only is Sue Stees the co-owner of a Panera Bread franchise in Tulsa, but she has been a breast cancer survivor for 22 years.

One day, Stees was thinking about what she could do as a franchise owner to reach out to women who have suffered or are suffering from the disease.

"When I had my lump detected, I remember how I frightened I was," Stees said. "I just thought about how it would be even more frightening if I had no money and that was my motivation."

She thought about wrapping a giant pink ribbon around the building. It was a good idea, she said, but would have been a little bit difficult to accomplish. So Stees decided to connect her professional life with her personal experience and created a pink bagel.

The first bagels were sold in eight of her Tulsa stores in 2001, and the next year, seven more of her franchises in Oklahoma City caught on to the concept.

"Most people can afford to purchase a bagel," Stees said. "And when they do so, they feel like they are supporting the cause."

Panera Bread decided to take Stees' bagels nationwide this year, to almost 1,000 of its stores. But the corporate



Sue Stees, creator of the Pink Ribbon Bagel and breast cancer survivor, and first lady Kim Henry roll out cherry-flavored dough to shape into Pink Ribbon Bagels.

office made a few changes to the original product. When Stees first made them in 2001, the bagels were pink in color because of cherry-flavored syrup. Now, the bagel isn't pink anymore.

Steas has been deemed "the mother bread" by the company, according to Panera's Oklahoma City market relations coordinator, Penny Stephenson. Seeing the impact of the bagels in the community is one thing, but having a personal connection makes it even more worthwhile.

Last year, more than 55,000 bagels were sold, and Steas is excited about the

future of her creation.

"Everyone seems to know someone (who) was touched by breast cancer, whether it's a family member or friend," Stephenson said. "But for us, Sue Steas is our personal hero."

More than just satisfying the taste buds or a grumbling tummy, everyone agrees that the Pink Ribbon Bagels are sure to be a conversation-starter.

Steas can tell her own story through the bagel, and it's through people like her that breast cancer awareness is increased. **OKG**



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