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Chock Full of Chocolate

Featured Photo: Master chocolatier and owner Jeanne-Louise Womble (right) has the help of her daughter Renée's display expertise.

By Amanda Southall

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It's a chocolate thing, a French thing and a family thing all rolled into one.

The result: high-quality locally-made chocolate delights.

After a career in health care, Jeanne-Louise Womble decided to try her hand at a new, sweet career. With the help of her family she opened de Rochonnet delights in Midlothian in October 2004.

The store's name is a tribute to her mother, who she said has always been a source of inspiration.

"I have two frequently asked questions," Womble said. "People want to know who the pretty lady is on the box, and they ask where de Rochonnet comes from."

The answer to both of those questions is: her mother.

Womble uses a photo of her mother for her logo, and de Rochonnet is a family name.

"de Rochonnet was my mother's middle name, it's my middle name, my daughter's middle name," Womble said.

Having her mother's name and image on the candy drives her even more to produce a quality product.

"My mother has always inspired me," she said. "It's important to me that I create the best possible chocolate because it doesn't just represent me, it represents my mother."

Mother's Day is always a special time for Womble. In addition to creating special products for mothers, she also makes sure to offer a large price range so even children can afford to give their mom a special treat.

"Mother's Day is very important to me. I want every mother to receive something nice," Womble said.

She had her first taste of candy-making more than 20 years ago when she started handing out Mickey Mouse suckers to her children's classes for Christmas.



photo by Brigitte Petrine

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The suckers became a tradition, and eventually she started experimenting with chocolate.

She took her first formal chocolate class in 2003 at the Ecole Chocolat in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she earned a general certification. She received her master of chocolatier's certificate at the Ecole du Grand Chocolat in Tournon, France. She traveled to Italy in 2005 to study further.

"I had to go to Europe to see how they made chocolate. They're the masters," she said. Now her daughter Renée handles the retail aspect of the shop, working under the watchful eye of her mother. Womble's son, Eric, is de Rochonnet's executive chef, and her husband Richard calls himself the "chief go-fer."

de Rochonnet's grandson Cody, who just turned 10, is the shop's junior buyer and taste tester.

"There's so much love and attention that goes into our chocolates. My son and I make everything together and my daughter does all of the creative packaging," Womble said. "I'm learning from my children."

All of the chocolates sold at de Rochonnet delights are made in Bon Air. Though chocolates, truffles and special treats can be bought in the Midlothian shop, many of the unique gifts should be special ordered. Specialty pastries made by dessert chef Marcy Doswell are also available.

"When you go to my store you're going to get my chocolate, we make it all," said Womble. Complacency is one thing you won't find in her store. Womble is constantly learning new things and expanding her business.

"I'm a student of chocolate. There's so much more to learn and try," she said. She has expanded her shop to include coffee and espresso drinks, pastries and gelato, Italian ice cream. She plans a trip to Spain soon to learn about spicier chocolates.

Her goal is to offer the Richmond area an opportunity to indulge in good chocolate. "Chocolate is one of the deep soul kinds of foods. I think that's why I love working with chocolate," she said. "We deserve good chocolate and we need to be able to treat ourselves."

Womble says that she usually works seven days a week. In addition to individual sales and orders, de Rochonnet also fills corporate orders and provides chocolates for charities.

As de Rochonnet delights continues to grow, Womble's goal remains the same. "There's nothing like a good piece of chocolate to make your day better. That's what I want to give my customers," she said.

Visit de Rochonnet delights at 13228 Midlothian Tpk. or at www.derochonnetdelights.com.

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