

CREATIVE CONFECTIONS

BY Kathleen J. Whaley | PHOTOGRAPHY BY Kamin Williams

A warm spirit, open mind, and love for a nostalgic treat led this respected Tallahassee fashion designer to launch one of the city's favorite confectioneries.

For years, Barbara McGarrah built a solid reputation in Florida's capital city as a designer and seamstress making custom suits for women professionals. Then, a 100-pound bag of peanuts arrived on her doorstep. Hoping to revive an old tradition, Barb had ordered the bag—the smallest bulk quantity available—to make homemade brittle to send as gifts to her large family. But looking back, Barb laughs and says, “I made brittle for everyone I could think of, and I still had 50 pounds left!”

So when she found out about an approaching crafts fair at the local senior center, she hatched an idea, started making more candy, and recruited help from friends and family to develop a brittle booth. “I tell people to this day it was the smartest decision I ever made,” says Barb, a warm smile spreading across her face.

Still, Barb was left with too many legumes to just throw away, so with a what-have-I-got-to-lose attitude, she kept making brittle on the side and people continued to go nuts over it. All the while, she planned to return to her career in fashion. But as her pile of peanuts diminished, her passion for making brittle only grew. Eventually Barb found herself trading in her home sewing business and fashion design career for a retail space—an old sewing machine shop in fact—that would become a storefront for Barb's Gourmet Brittles.

Now in a charming cottage-turned-candy-shop on Tallahassee's lovely Lake Ella, Barb serves up more than 25 varieties of brittle candy, including flavored chocolate selections, seed brittles, and even nut-free options. And just like her classic peanut variety, Barb developed each one to showcase and enhance the distinct flavor of



the nut or seed being used, whether almond or pecan, pistachio or pumpkin seed. “Having a fashion design degree, I'm always looking to push the envelope for something different,” she explains. To that end, she has also developed creative confections like brittle ice cream, brittle cookies, and brittle pralines, which are served on a regular basis, and brittle muffins, brittle pies, and brittle popcorn, which are offered at various times throughout the year.

“Everything in life has contributed to us getting here,” reflects Barb, who enjoys now having her name on the front of a brittle package instead of a label hidden inside a suit jacket. She also appreciates that the classic candy has given her a chance to broaden her clientele and interact with so many special people. “I look at my life now, and think, *Wow. Look at how much I would have missed out on had I not made the brittle,*” she says. “I feel blessed in knowing that I really enjoy what I'm doing.” ❖

For information, contact Barb's Gourmet Brittles at 850-385-9839, or visit barbsbrittles.com.

