

Alumna finds the right ingredients for a sweet business venture

Emily Lavroff earned a degree in Business Administration from Ramapo College in 2012. After graduation, she worked in a corporate job until May 2021 when she decided instead to pursue her creative passion. Her knowledge of business basics came in handy and she established her own company, Emily's Bake Shop. She even got her kitchen officially licensed so she could bake products and sell them from her home in Franklin Park, New Jersey. You could say her success has been a sweet surprise, but then again...she was more than ready for the challenge.

Tell us about your business, Emily's Bake Shop.

Emily's Bake Shop specializes in custom decorated cookies for special occasions. I take my customer's vision and I make it into a custom cookie to match the special theme. I do my best work when I'm given creative freedom and I enjoy working with customers to make their vision come to life. My information can be found on my website at emilysbakeshop.com or on my Instagram page [Instagram.com/emilysbakeshop](https://www.instagram.com/emilysbakeshop)

What inspired you to start your own business? And how did you manage during the pandemic?

I've always loved baking and initially started my LLC to bake and sell all kinds of baked goods. I also was always a huge fan of arts and crafts and I've tried almost ever craft, from knitting to beading to embroidery to calligraphy. I took a cookie decorating class at Michael's Craft Store in 2019 and was immediately hooked. This amazing class combined all of my favorite things into one – baking and being creative! I tried new techniques and I have enjoyed navigating the learning process of cookie decorating. The trajectory of my business changed when I got better at making custom cookies. That was all customers were asking for!

Leaving my job in corporate IT sales was a really tough decision, especially in the middle of the pandemic, but it was the best decision I ever made. I knew that it would be life changing and challenging, but I also knew that the quality of my life would be so much better if I put 100% of my energy into something I'm absolutely passionate about. Cookie sales during the pandemic didn't slow down as I expected them to. Customers still wanted to celebrate special events, even if they were on a much smaller scale. Now that events are normalizing, the size of my

orders has increased. My largest order so far was making 300 cookies for a wedding!

Tell us about your experience as a Ramapo student.

My experience as a resident student was the best college experience I could've asked for. I grew up in North Brunswick and wanted to go to school in New Jersey, but I wanted to be far enough from home to really enjoy and ingrain myself in the college experience. I met my best friends at Ramapo and I learned so much that has helped me become the business owner that I am today. Also, being in the Delta Phi Epsilon sorority helped me network tremendously. Many of my sorority sisters have ordered cookies from me and I couldn't be more grateful. My business classes were definitely valuable, specifically business marketing, entrepreneurship, and accounting which have really helped me with this business endeavor.

What advice can you offer for students who are interested in becoming business owners?

I suggest finding something that you really enjoy doing and doing the very best that you can. Learn as much as possible and listen to other people in your industry. My favorite business quote is "Community over competition." I have found that my New Jersey baking community has been most helpful in this journey. We look out for each other and we're all in this together.

Running a business is not easy – it includes all the behind-the-scenes aspects including bookkeeping, paying taxes, ordering supplies, tracking orders, and answering emails. But if you're doing what you love and what you're passionate about, it is all worth it!

Also, social media is an absolute game changer – Instagram and TikTok aren't just for posting funny memes and videos anymore. I would say 80% of my business comes from social media alone, so learn how to take pictures of your products and promote yourself and you'll go far.