



# Betty Jane Candies

Not just for holidays anymore... but okay, for holidays too!

By Bryce Parks

There's no time like Valentine's Day to find out what that hold up is on the new Betty Jane Candies retail store that has been coming soon... for some time now, to JFK Road in the previous IHOP restaurant location. So we snuck up on owner Andrew Siegert when he wasn't looking and put him to the chocolatey

interrogation. You'll be happy to hear that soon means, well, maybe today!

"We thought we'd open in October," laughs Siegert, from behind the desk we promised to not tell anyone about that showed, um, visual proof of just how busy he is these days.

"It's been goofy stuff like... we're waiting five months on a door. Five months! We had to do quite a lot of renovations over there, and with that many contractors, things happen. And they're busier than ever too. We really hope to open by the end of January in time for Valentine's Day. We don't want to do it too close to the major holiday, so if it gets too close, we'll wait until after Feb. 14 to open. But everything's now ready. We should be able to do the inspection this week, and assuming there's no more issues with things not showing up, we can get it opened. We have a little luck on our side because Valentine's Day is basically a three-day storm of guys coming in for chocolates right before the big day. It's not like Christmas and Easter that last for a month of craziness. If we can get moved in with a week to spare before Valentine's Day, it'll happen."

The big, fabulous, new retail location is just the next step in what has been somewhat of a behind-the-scenes transition

to a whole new business model for the venerable Dubuque sweets landmark.

"We're always going to be loyal to and appreciate our local customers," assures Siegert. "They're still our main customers, and they started all of this. But we're fortunate that we're now a semi-national company. We're in 120 plus Sam's Clubs all over the country as well as Hy-Vee and Fairway stores, and our e-commerce is reaching every state in the nation."

It represents a lot of growth and trying to keep up the last five years that you may not have even known was happening.

"When we launched the snack line, that's the cornerstone of our wholesale department, and that's where we're seeing the massive growth and having trouble keeping up," explains Siegert. "So we actually added even more new equipment this year, and we actually just purchased a second chocolate line to be installed this fall.

Go figure, but with supply chain issues, a four-month wait is now about a 10-month lead time to get that equipment. That line will be installed into the existing Betty Jane Candies building on Asbury Road.

"That should more than double our output when it arrives in the fall, and we're really excited about that. It gives us some exciting opportunities that we've not been

able to take advantage of because we're maxed out on production and space."

Being maxed out on space has everything to do with why there is soon to be a big beautiful new retail location on JFK. Yes, the street gets 4,000 more cars a day than their already busy Asbury Road location, but that reason is secondary to simply needing every inch of the original space to prepare for the future.

Did you even know that they did a significant addition to the Asbury Road location about five years ago already? It was at the back of the property, so it may have slid past your attention like a Gremlin on a dashboard on a hot summer day. That expansion made it possible to really launch the snack line of Betty Jane's treats, and that snack line is the driver that has turned the company in the major "minor" player in the chocolate scene. More on that later.

"Without the expansion, it would have been tough to do much more than we were doing. More raw materials on hand, more finished product on hand. Moving retail will free up space we desperately need. Our volume has gone up so much that some of our suppliers have had trouble adapting to our increases. COVID and supply chain hurts too, but when raw material needs goes up 40 percent a year, it can



be hard to keep up. Cost increases due to COVID were a reality too, but the supply chain was not an issue until now."

But you can only control what you can control. So grow-on they must.

"We're excited for the additional exposure and a much larger store inside on JFK," shares Siegert. "We'll have more storage, so our shipping department can run out of there as well. When COVID happened, we saw a huge shift to online orders, even locally, and that hasn't changed as things have otherwise come back to normal. And the new store is bigger than both of the old stores combined anyway."

Once moved in, the entire space of the current building on Asbury Road will fully transition to production and storage and will have no retail. They added production space as well as a bigger than ever store which means more jobs

too, on top of the crew that just grew to 40 and is still looking for more to add.

This will leave just one lone, dedicated, local retail space in Dubuque, but and that's largely due to the shift in the business model. Instead of three stores with their name in it, they now have hundreds of stores focusing on their key products. Even inside Dubuque they have a lot of wholesalers carrying their more popular lines including Hy-Vee, Fareway, Hartig Drug, and local hospital gift shops.

"When we get the second new line in, we'll be able to bring back some products we put on the shelf because we have to focus on the top sellers simply because production is maxed out."

Nice problem to have.

"There are probably 20 plus products that we make but have not been able to make in a while, explains Siegert. "So that will come back as well as ideas for new

products. Ten years ago, 300 pounds of Gremlins in a day would be a good day for production. Now, we are regularly cranking out 2,400 pounds of fresh Gremlins a day, and it's still not enough to meet demand. But the second line will be 33 percent bigger than our currently line, so we'll be able to more than double our production."

Wow. Oh, and don't worry. Many of your favorites are still in production including the chocolate caramels, chocolate covered nuts, cream centers, truffles, and toffee. It's all on the website, and really soon, in the new store too!

So what's the difference between a classic Gremlin and the snack line version? Gremlin Snackers are mainly different from traditional Gremlins in terms of how they are produced. The Gremlins you know and love are hand-dipped, polished, and hand-packed neatly in the famous Betty Jane Candies boxes. High on presentation but also high on manpower. The Snackers have the same great ingredients, but they are simply produced by a machine on a production line and packaged in a bag without the polish or handling, so there's significantly less labor involved, allowing for the price to be lower.

The Gremlins you love are exactly the same as they ever were, and if you get a pound for your loved one (or the loved one you pretend to have so you can get them for yourself), they'll still be beautifully packed in a one-pound white box, milk or dark chocolate, and polished to perfection before you polish them off the rest of the way. And hey, if beauty and presentation are not a big deal, you can get the same delicious taste in the snack version at a discount. Close your eyes, and you can't tell the difference!

The same game plan goes for their whole snack line which is now the focus of

growth for the future. Those include the addictive Betty Bites which are pretzels, Gremlins, caramel, and Betty Jane milk chocolate topped with sea salt. 6 oz. for \$6, 12 oz. for \$11. Sold! As for the Chocolate Pretzels, you can get a 10 oz. bag for \$5.49.

But holidays are still a huge deal for Dubuque's favorite chocolatiers.

"Christmas is by far the biggest holiday for us. Noting else is even close. Then Easter and then Valentine's Day. But keep in mind that our wholesale business now does well more than all of our holiday business combined and keeps us busy all year long. It used to be kind of nice to have these peaks and then we could rest a bit, but those days are over, everyday is like Christmas anymore. It's a nice problem to have".

Hey, we just said that!

Betty Jane Candies has been in gift bags for the Grammys, named Top Culinary Gift in Iowa and Top 50 in the nation by *People Magazine*, named one of the top chocolate shops in the nation by *Taste of Home Magazine*, and less-surprisingly, a 20 plus year BestFest winner.

As big as they've be getting, Andrew laughs at the idea of taking over the chocolate world.

"I see lists of the production of some of these big boys in the business, and it's staggering. It would take a whole lot to come even close to touching their coattails."

So instead, Betty Jane Candies will focus on being the best and on smart growth that gains them new fans while never sacrificing the quality that made them famous in the first place. ■



## Betty Jane Candies

1785 JOHN F KENNEDY RD, DUBUQUE, IA  
(OPENING SOON!)

563-582-4668

BETTYJANECANDIES.COM

Hours: Mon-Fri: 9:30 AM-7 PM;  
Sat: 9:30 AM-5 PM; Sun: 11 AM-5 PM

### SUBMIT YOUR DINING SUGGESTIONS!

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE RESTAURANT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE US VISIT? PLEASE SEND US YOUR REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS!  
EMAIL: [DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM](mailto:DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM)