

Barbara Beery, Batter Up Kids

This cookin' mama is creating the next generation of young chefs.

Story by Sue Durio

Photos by Susan Hoermann/Evergreen Studios



THE YEAR WAS 1991 AND BARBARA BEERY WAS a stay-at-home mom with three youngsters underfoot. Like many of her friends, she had tried a variety of things to bring precious extra dollars into the household. "I was babysitting and tutoring, but I just didn't love it," she said.

But with much soul searching and brainstorming, Beery ultimately came up with a business concept she did love - and based on her success, it's one her customers love too. The recipe for her success, she said, came when she finally arrived at a business that combined her passions - teaching kids and cooking. Since then, Batter Up Kids has grown from classes in Beery's kitchen to a smorgasbord of national media engagements, new franchises, acclaimed cookbooks and an online retail outlet launching this spring. "It took a lot of inward reflection for me to realize what I really love to do is teach kids," said Beery, who earned a bachelor's in elementary education from The University of Texas. Even after landing a job teaching in the preschool where her children were enrolled, the idea of creating children's cooking classes kept creeping into her mind. "I had taken my own kids to cooking classes," she said, "and was unimpressed."

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In 1991, the self-avowed foodie began offering kids classes geared to making cooking fun and healthy. Soon, her Northwest Hills home kitchen became cooking central for preschoolers, with classes juggled around her preschool teaching schedule. A few years later, when a friend asked her if she would do a cooking class for her child's birthday party, she added parties to the mix. Between the preschool job, caring for her own children, and teaching classes on the side, Beery laughed, she "had a kid overdose" some days.

With the budding chefs gathered around her huge pine kitchen table, Beery introduced new concepts through engaging themes. "The key is to make it fun for the kids. Parents are looking for healthy, but kids are looking for fun - and the themes are fun," she said. At Batter Up Kids' Glam-a-Lot Spa Parties, for instance, participants make potions and lotions, then use the same ingredients to create smoothies and muffins. At Big League Chew Parties, they create their own bubble gum and baseball treats. "Barbara has a gift with

"In 2003, I got a publisher to buy my first cookbook," she said of *Delicious Desserts*, based on her party menus. She now has four nationally published cookbooks, three more in the works for 2008 and another three planned for 2009. "The cookbooks gave me credibility," said Beery, who soon found herself a sought-after spokesperson and interviewee. She has appeared on more than 40 nationally-syndicated radio shows, been a guest on Food Network's *Good Eats*, featured in *Every Day with Rachael Ray* magazine, was the national spokesperson for Sun-Maid Raisins and much more.

"I wasn't taught how to do interviews, but when you are teaching kids, it is like being on stage. You have to be prepared, professional and approach every class as a TV



Keep Peace in the Kitchen Kingdom with These Fairy Tale Treats

What: Beery's *Pink Princess Cookbook* is full of magical treats like Enchanted Unicorn Horns, Fairy Berry Tea and Pink Princess Cake. A portion of every sale goes to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

Where: Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Borders, Hastings and other book retailers.

Website: www.BatterUpKids.com and www.KidsCookingShop.com

kids," said friend, neighbor and client Julie L. Metzger. "She believes in them 100% and is very positive. She helped my daughter, a tweenager, enjoy cooking and helping in the kitchen. Barbara makes cooking 'cool'."

Soon, Beery was pitching cookbook ideas built around her kid-winning themed recipes inspired by observing the popular media, like upcoming Disney movies and Food Network programming. "Recipe development is my strength," she said. "I'm always looking for normal recipes that could be made kid-friendly."

Even so, it took Beery's trademark passion and perseverance to get her first book published. "In 2000, I pitched cookbook ideas to 10 publishers, got turned down by all of them or had no response," she recalled. By 2002, she secured a literary agent, and reworked cookbook proposals time and again.

show. All those years of teaching classes parlayed into television interviews," she said. In May, Beery becomes a seasonal regular on *The Today Show* where she'll lead kid-friendly cooking segments beginning with a Mother's Day brunch segment.

By 2006, it was clear to Beery that the business had outgrown her kitchen and her own capacity. After hosting her last home-based birthday cooking party in May 2006, Beery shifted her sights to growing a successful franchise business. "I was outgrowing the business on my own and I couldn't keep up with the demand," she said. "People had asked me over and over how I got started, and I realized there was an opportunity there to build the business." Beery began looking for her first franchisee and an Austin location. In early 2007, opened the first Batter Up Kids storefront. Sadly, she admitted, it wasn't a match made in heaven and the relationship dissolved. "I have a driven, no-defeat attitude and even though the experience in Austin just about knocked the socks

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Barger has initiated many new concepts for her little restaurant fiefdom. The organic garden is not only onsite to provide healthy delicious produce for the restaurant but is also used as a teaching tool to educate one and all on the benefits of sustainable agriculture. A line of scrumptious salad dressings was available for sale in many local grocery stores but unfortunately, due to rising costs, they have had to pull out of that market. But never fear. The dressings you have come to covet will be available at Pitchforks and Tablespoons. The popular Cater Yourself concept is being redesigned, so look forward to a new way to enjoy all that Eastside Café has to offer at your domicile.

Barger also thinks big for birthdays. In March, Eastside Café celebrated 20 years of business and she believes the bash should last all year with the creation of a giant fundraising opportunity. A Happy Birthday to Us party on March 16th kicked off a long string of events that will be posted on the website throughout the year. Items from Eastside Café's original opening menu will be featured with \$1 donated from each dish to be divided between three non-profit organizations close to Barger's and Martin's hearts - AIDS Services of Austin, Waterloo Counseling and Urban Roots. Barger has supported AIDS Services of Austin for years and received the United Way Champion Volunteer of the Year Award in 2002.

"In order for change to take place, there had to be an example that businesses could work on the east side and anchors of stability were necessary to achieve that goal," asserts Barger. Eastside Café has become one of those rocks of the community.

"I do think we've made a big difference and though, at the time, most thought we were crazy, I NEVER thought we were crazy! I looked at this piece of property and said to Elaine, 'this is going to be a goldmine. It is five minutes from UT, six minutes from downtown and when this city starts building, everyone in the world is going to want to live over here because there's no traffic, nice older homes, beautiful old trees and a special neighborhood feel.'" Twenty years later, one major dream has come true and we all wait with excited anticipation to see what this force of nature, Dorsey Barger, will dream and serve up next. ★

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off of me, I was always outreaching," said Beery, of her search for the right franchise fit.

A year later, she believes she has found it, with franchises soon opening in Nebraska, Iowa and Ohio. "I learned from the Austin situation that I let decisions be made that I wasn't comfortable with. I erred on wanting so badly for it to happen," she said. Far from derailing the business or her enthusiasm, the experience simply opened other new opportunities. "Barbara is one of the most positive people I know. She always looks at the glass as half-full," said Metzger. "She always has a smile on her face no matter what her adversity; she always lifts your spirits."

Among the new projects putting a smile on Beery's face is a retail website (www.kidscookingshop.com) launching this spring. "It's like a huge Williams-Sonoma for kids with cookbooks, gadgets, utensils, you name it," she said. The site features more than 400 individual products, all geared to making cooking fun.

And what does Beery do for fun? When she's not traveling as a spokesperson, on a cookbook photo shoot or meeting with franchisees, you're likely to find Barbara Beery in exactly the place where it all started: her own kitchen table. "On a typical day I'm up at 5 a.m. with coffee in front of the computer, answering emails, working on the new website, setting up appointments with the media or prospective franchisees," she said. "What do I do for fun? This is what I do!" ★

MORE INFO

www.BatterUpKids.com
www.KidsCookingShop.com

KATHRYN DAGAR-ALBARADO from page 62 canceled a well-deserved trip to Lebanon, Egypt and Italy. We rented facilities, china, linens, glassware, etc. Everything went without a hitch - except between the brides and the grooms."

Dagar-Albarado has an anthology of anecdotes - successes snatched from the maw of unavoidable mishaps - accompanied by a long list of fascinating people she has encountered such as President Clinton and both President Bushes, Tom Hanks, Jeff Bridges and astronaut Jim Lovell. Cherished memories are the services

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