

Main Street Gourmet honored

By Katie Byard

Beacon Journal staff writer

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Main Street Gourmet strives for perfection when making muffins and other baked goods.

But it's the 100-employee Akron company's imperfect muffins and other treats that helped the company snag an award for community involvement in 2009.

Main Street's wildly successful No Muffin Left Behind sales feature overstocked batter and "off spec" baked goods sold at a discount.

The majority of the proceeds benefit the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, which works with area food pantries.

"People literally line up hours before we open," Main Street co-founder and co-CEO Steve Marks said Wednesday. "It's like a rock concert."

On Wednesday, representatives of the Entrepreneurs EDGE nonprofit, which gives the award, visited the company at its offices and plant on Muffin Lane in the Ascot Industrial Park.

The smell of baked goods wafted through the air outside the facility as the group gathered for a ceremony at a tree planted to honor the award's namesake, Richard Shatten.

Hailed as an economic development visionary, Shatten was a Cleveland educator and civic leader who died in 2002, at age 46, of a brain tumor.

The Shatten Civic Distinction Award also recognizes Main Street's other community contributions, including its hiring of adults with developmental disabilities and its work with Akron General Medical Center on developing Muffins for Mammograms.

Marks also was recognized for creating the Road Runner Akron Marathon, which attracted about 10,000 runners for its seventh running Sept. 26.

Marks acknowledged the marathon doesn't generate huge annual sums for charity — \$15,000 last year.

The main focus, Marks said, is "promoting health and fitness" and keeping the event viable.

Marks seemed more comfortable talking about his business — its roots and growth — than getting plaudits.

"We're not trying to make a statement," he said. "We're elated we got the award . . . But we have so many people that volunteer their time for these programs. We couldn't do it without them."

Marks told Wednesday's visitors about the company's growth from a single retail operation on Main Street in downtown Akron in 1987 to a maker of frozen baked goods for wholesale distribution. Clients include Caribou Coffee, Panera Bread and Cracker Barrel.

Sales are about \$20 million annually, Marks said.

Despite the weak economy, the company is having a good year, Marks said, as it picks up accounts from others.

He isn't resting easy, however.

"I don't have any confidence in the next 12 months," he said.

Marks said he never truly relaxes.

"I go home and I think about work all the time," he said. "I run every day. Without me doing that, I'd be a wreck."

The company's charitable efforts helped Main Street win the title of 2009 Innovative Bakery of the Year from Bakery Management Magazine.

The magazine also took note of Main Street's program that solicits employee suggestions.

For more information on the Entrepreneurs EDGE organization, which assists existing mid-market companies in the region, go to <http://www.edgef.org>.

Katie Byard can be reached at 330-996-3781 or kbyard@thebeaconjournal.com.



Steve Marks, CEO and Founder of Main Street Gourmet with stacks of muffin tins in the production facility in Akron. The company is the newest recipient of the Shatten Civic Distinction Award from Entrepreneurs Edge. (Mike Cardew/Akron Beacon Journal)

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