

Firm sends cookies for clients

► A Tulsa couple's idea is growing into a franchise network.

By **NICOLE NASCENZI**
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An old family recipe for chocolate chip cookies is making a lot of dough for a Tulsa couple.

Kim and Duane Carns own Cookie Advantage, but they do a lot more than bake treats — they've turned customer appreciation into a business.

The Carnses' operation provides a service to companies looking to thank clients or follow up with potential customers. Cookie Advantage sends a gift tin of freshly made chocolate chip cookies to the recipient on a company's behalf.

"We do all the work, and you get all the credit," Kim said. "The only place you ever see our name is on the bottom of the tin."

The gift package contains a dozen or more cookies, a card with the sending company's logo and sometimes a customer survey. The package's return address is not that of Cookie Advantage — it's the sending company's address, so the cookies appear to have originated

SEE COOKIE E-2



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Kim and Duane Carns, co-owners of Cookie Advantage, have done well enough to franchise their business. They expect more than \$1 million in cookie sales this year as the franchise network expands.

COOKIE:

Duane Carns works at a car dealership.

FROM E-1

ed from there.

The Carnses say they expect to earn more than \$1 million in cookie sales this year as their company expands its franchise network.

Duane said he and his wife developed their business model in 1998 and started the company in 1999 with plans to franchise the concept. Today, Cookie Advantage has a total of six franchises in Minnesota, Arizona, Missouri and Texas, and plans to launch more this year.

The company is based at

11033 S. Memorial Drive and online at www.cookieadvantage.com.

Duane said he created the business model so franchisees could launch their businesses with minimal start-up costs and not have to work more than 40 hours a week. Each franchise pays the Carnses an initial \$15,000 fee, and between 3 percent and 5 percent of its sales.

In Tulsa, Cookie Advantage has one part-time and two full-time employees because Kim spends much of her time traveling to help set up franchises and cultivate interest in the business. The company's facilities include a commercial kitchen, an area for training franchisees and a business office.

Duane, who continues to work full time at a car dealership, estimates that franchisees need \$50,000 in commercial baking equipment, but those costs can

vary.

The Carnses plan to spread about 80 franchises across the country. Customers place cookie orders online and can choose which Cookie Advantage franchise fills the order.

Cookies are fresher when they are baked locally, and recipients appreciate seeing a local postmark, Kim said.

"We believe in keeping the business at a local level," she said.

Kim said Cookie Advantage provides its franchisees with the cookie recipe, general training and advice on how to jump-start sales.

Rockey Dvorak and his wife, Mary, opened a Cookie Advantage franchise 2½ years ago in Olathe, Kan.

"Business has been good," Dvorak said.

The Dvoraks' Cookie Advan-

tage franchise has become their sole source of income.

But franchisees have to take a risk and then work hard — they're responsible for selling the service to customers and filling orders.

"Baking the cookies is the easy side of the business," Kim said.

At the Carnses Tulsa operation, the client list includes several car dealerships, doctors, real estate agencies and money managers.

The most common gift is a tin filled with one dozen cookies, which costs about \$20. Larger tins are available.

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