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Section D

OBSERVER-REPORTER SUNDAY, NOV. 6, 2005



A sample of the spice mixes Evelyn Pihou of Canonsburg developed to help make a home-cooked meal easier.

## INCREDIBLE EDIBLES

Canonsburg woman's product line influenced by her Greek heritage

By LIZ ROGERS  
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CANONSBURG – When Evelyn Pihou can't sleep, she heads to the kitchen.

She may have food on her mind, but Pihou forgoes any midnight raids on the refrigerator, opting instead to plug away at her fledgling business.

Pihou, with her husband, Pete, last year launched Evelyn's Elegant Edibles, a line of prepackaged foods and seasoning packets with a Mediterranean twist. The couple's modest kitchen on West College Street is perfect – for now – for packaging their products.

"I've always been in the food business," Evelyn Pihou said. Before retiring a few years back, her father, Bill Moniodes of Canonsburg, owned Olympic Catering. And her husband's family owned the former Canonsburg Food Co., a wholesale food supplier.

But it was her grandmother, Irene Moniodes, who was the inspiration for Evelyn's Elegant Edibles and what is fast-becoming the product line's best seller, Yiayia's Special Occasion Rice.

"It started with my grandmother's recipe," Pihou said. "She was just a natural cook."

Moniodes, now 90, was one of the original cooks for the annual Greek Orthodox church food festival, which, it just so happens, originated with Pete Pihou's father.

On holidays, Yiayia – Greek for grandmother – served a regional Greek rice dish, prepared with raisins, ground meat, onions and a blend of spices. Evelyn Pihou loved the dish, and decided to duplicate the recipe so she could have it anytime she wanted.

Her grandmother agreed to share the recipe, and Pihou embarked on what would become a years-long project. Among her challenges: Yiayia cooked in large quantities for her family of eight. And she did it without the benefit of a recipe.

"She would put a handful of cinnamon in her hand, and I would try to grab it out of her hand to put it in a measuring cup," Evelyn Pihou recalled. "The first time was like a nightmare. I think we used a five-pound bag of rice. To break it down for use with a cup of rice was something."

Please see Edibles, Page D3



Pihou fills packets with spices.



Evelyn Pihou and her husband, Pete, oversee the operation of Evelyn's Elegant Edibles in the kitchen of their Canonsburg home.

O-R photos by Jim McNutt



Pihou's Gourmet Meatloaf is easy enough to make: Just add meat and water, and bake.

## Food Network has appetite for area entrepreneurs

Food Network apparently has found the Pittsburgh area to its liking as it showcases more area entrepreneurs this week on the television series "Recipe for Success."

Hot Dogma, a Pittsburgh-based gourmet hot dog shop that was the subject of an *Observer-Reporter* restaurant profile in June, will be featured on the program at 9:30 p.m. Tuesday. The show will air again at 12:30 p.m. Dec. 4 and 17. Last summer, Don and Laura Ross shared with viewers the story behind their South Strabane Township business, The Toffee House.



LIZ ROGERS  
MORSELS

Three recent college graduates created Hot Dogma by converting Trinity Cathedral's vacant Oliver Avenue storefront into a gleaming shop with a black-and-white checkerboard floor, tables and chairs, comfy couches and free wireless Internet.

Co-owner Tim Tobitsch says in the year-and-a-half since it opened, the shop has done all it can to stay in business, including offering catering and delivery.

"Truthfully, it's crunch time for us," he said. "People definitely like our product, but downtown Pittsburgh as a whole is struggling to have a strong retail presence, and those struggles adversely impact our day-to-day operations."

He's hoping "Recipe for Success" will help ensure continued success for Hot Dogma and help create awareness of what the downtown has to offer.

For more information about Hot Dogma, visit its Web site, [www.hotdogmapgh.com](http://www.hotdogmapgh.com), or e-mail Tobitsch at [tim@hotdogmapgh.com](mailto:tim@hotdogmapgh.com).

A holiday dinner tradition for many, the Green Bean Casserole is celebrating its 50th year.

Dorcas Reilly, former manager of Campbell's Kitchen, developed the recipe in 1955 to "create a quick and easy recipe around things most Americans always had on hand at the time: green beans and Cream of Mushroom Soup." And with only five ingredients, the dish takes just 10 minutes to prepare and 25 minutes to bake.

### Green Bean Casserole

Makes 10 servings

**Ingredients**

2 cans (10 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounces each) Campbell's Condensed Cream of Mushroom or 98 Percent Fat-Free Cream of Mushroom Soup

- 1 cup milk
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground black pepper
- 8 cups cooked cut green beans
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups French's French Fried Onions

Mix soup, milk, soy sauce, black pepper, beans and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups fried onions in 3-quart casserole. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes or until hot. Stir. Sprinkle with remaining onions. Bake 5 minutes.

For a twist, try one of these variations suggested by today's Campbell's Kitchen:

■ Stir in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup shredded cheddar cheese with the soup. Omit soy sauce. Sprinkle with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup additional cheddar cheese and use French's Cheddar French Fried Onions.

■ For a roasted garlic flavor, substitute Campbell's Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup with Roasted Garlic for Cream of Mushroom Soup.

■ Substitute 4 cups cooked broccoli florets for the green beans.

■ Stir in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped red pepper with soup.

■ Substitute Campbell's Condensed Golden Mushroom Soup for Cream of Mushroom Soup for a heartier flavor. Omit soy sauce. Stir in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped red pepper with green beans.

For more recipes, visit [www.campbell-soup.com](http://www.campbell-soup.com).

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INSIDE  
THIS  
SECTION

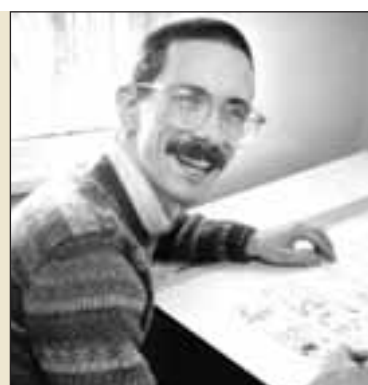
### Luck of the draw

The Washington County Manufacturers Association is helping the American Red Cross by selling chances to win a golf membership. Page D4



### Missing in action

"Calvin & Hobbes" creator goes the distance to maintain his privacy. Page D6



### Oh, mime

Mt. Lebanon resident creates a career as a physical comedian. Brad Hundt's story on Page D7



# Edibles: Woman's product line influenced by Greek heritage

Continued from Page D1

After plenty of trial and error, Pihou achieved perfection, but she wanted Yiayia's approval. She asked her grandmother to taste it to determine what was missing.

"She examined it, she tasted it, she put it down," Pihou recalled. "She looked at again, took another bite. I asked, 'So what's wrong with it?' She said, 'The parsley's chopped too fine.' That was the only thing she could find wrong with it," Pihou said with a chuckle. "She likes it, obviously; she calls me to make it."

Other products in the rice line include Popie's Pine Nut and Basil Rice, for her mother, Kalliope, "but everybody calls her Popie." The Athenian Rice is a traditional Greek rice, one that might be found at a Greek food festival. And her latest rice creation is Mamma's Magnificent Mouthwatering Rice, a sweet and spicy combination that contains golden raisins, red pepper flakes and assorted seasonings.

Her spice mixes are designed to make creating a home-cooked meal easy. The meatloaf mix is fool-proof: Just add meat and water, and bake. "By the time your oven is heated, the meat's ready to go in," she said.

The New York Style Chili Dog Sauce was created with Pihou's great aunt in mind; years ago, she was a New York City hot dog vendor. She's since retired to Florida and Greece, but wouldn't reveal her recipe for her chili sauce.

"My dad remembers it, so my dad and I developed the New York chili sauce," she said. "It's very popular, especially on the Fourth of July."

Versatility is important to Pihou. The Bayou Spice Mix, for example, can be used to season chicken or pork. Add the mix to some sour cream and it becomes a dip. Combined with olive oil, the Tuscan Spice Mix makes a robust Italian dipping oil. Or sprinkle some on pita bread, add feta cheese and bake for a crispy snack.

Pete Pihou pointed out that the mixes are cost-effective, too. "Think about when you go to the store and you buy a little jar of spices," he said. "You'll probably spend \$30 if you were to try to blend what was in the little packets."

Some of the recipes call for using the entire package; others, depending on the dish, contain enough seasoning for three or dishes.



A dish made with Yiayia's Special Occasion Rice Mix

When they're not packaging and filling orders, Evelyn and Pete Pihou can be found at one of several seasonal farm markets in the region or a craft show. Her line is stocked by one retailer, the Savvy Fox, a consignment store in Donaldson's Crossroads, and is also available online.

Some day, she'd like to expand. "I'd love to see my product on QVC. Wouldn't that be great?"

Evelyn also takes orders by phone. And don't worry about calling too late; she's probably up working, anyway.

Evelyn's *Elegant Edibles* are available online at [www.evelynselegantedibles.com](http://www.evelynselegantedibles.com).

## Specialty salts elevate everyday dish

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Pity the salt shaker.

It served us well until TV chefs began touting coarse salt and then gourmet finishing salts to enhance everything from asparagus to ahi. Pushing rocky French sel gris (gray salt) through the wee holes of a shaker is akin to threading a needle with a rope.

Today, we need pinch pots, salt-cellars and grinders to accommodate our growing salt habit. Language translation dictionaries might help, too, as would geology and geography texts. Mark Kur'ansky's 496-page "Salt: A World History" (Penguin, 2003) provides further guidance.

Globe-trotting chefs have made salt this year's peppercorn (or flavored vinegar or infused oil). Web purveyors and, to a lesser extent, gourmet shops have supplied the curious by charging \$1 and more for an ounce of Mother Nature's

mineral deposits.

"If you change just one thing in your kitchen, start with the salt," says TV chef and author Michael Chiarello, who knows that an interesting salt elevates everyday dishes.

As for sodium content, salt is salt. A teaspoon is about 2,400 milligrams of sodium, which is the most the Food and Drug Administration says a person should have in a day. Americans in general have too much sodium in their diets, though much of it comes from processed foods. But because most culinary salts are coarse, you'll get less in a teaspoon than if you use fine table salt.

Many home cooks have already switched from table salt to coarse kosher salt, but even that seems provincial now. There's no turning back to Morton once you've sprinkled salt from France, Wales, Australia or Italy on your sauteed portobello mushrooms.

The same is true for a host of other salts. Historic and exotic, Utah's Jurassic salt is a relic from when dinosaurs roamed the earth 150-million years ago. Hawaiian sea salt gets its delicate sunset pink from volcanic red clay, and how pretty it looks sprinkled on creamy mashed potatoes.

We recently tried a few varieties on pedestrian scrambled eggs, sauteed spinach and grilled salmon, and found that they tasted better for it. For instance, the sulphurous black salt of India, Kala Namak, disappeared into creamy scrambled eggs whereas harsher coarse salt screamed its presence in a bite-by-bite comparison.

Besides being flavorful, finishing salts are a festive garnish with their light-catching crystals. If you want to really test their power, taste them alongside table salt. You'll find the table salt unpleasantly harsh, almost bitter compared with the pureness of the newcomers.

## RECIPES

### Mamma's Mouthwatering Chicken and Rice

#### Ingredients

- 1 package of Mamma's Mouthwatering Rice Mix
- 4 chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 3 tablespoons olive oil

In large pot or skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of oil. Add chicken and brown lightly on both sides. Add Mamma's Mouthwatering Rice Mix and 3½ cups water to chicken along with remaining olive oil. Cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to simmer and cook until rice is cooked and all liquid is absorbed. Serve with salad for a complete meal.

### Magnificent Mona Lisa Spice Dip

#### Ingredients

- 1 package Magnificent Mona Lisa Spice Mix
- 1 (24-ounce) container sour cream

Mix together until blended. Serve with chips, vegetables or top a baked potato.

### Tuscan Pita Chips

#### Ingredients

- 5 pita breads with pocket
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons Tuscan Spice Mix
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Split each pita bread in half. Brush with olive oil, cut into wedges about 8 pieces per round. Spread out onto 2 baking sheets; sprinkle with Tuscan Spice Mix and feta cheese and bake for 10 to 15 minutes until lightly browned. Serve.

### Tuscan White Pizza

#### Ingredients

- 1 prepared pizza crust
- 2 tablespoons olive oil



Chicken made with Chicken Spice Mix for Chicken or Pork from Evelyn's *Elegant Edibles*

- 2 tablespoons Tuscan Spice Mix
- 1 large tomato, sliced thin
- 1 medium onion, sliced thin
- 1 cup cheese, shredded (your choice)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Brush pizza crust with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Place tomatoes on crust, top with onion rings and cheese. Drizzle the other tablespoon of olive oil on top of cheese and sprinkle the remaining Tuscan Spice Mix over cheese. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until cheese is melted and crust is cooked. Cut into wedges and enjoy.

### Athenian Green Beans

#### Ingredients

- 1 pound fresh green beans
- 1 Athenian Spice Mix

Clean green beans, cutting off ends. Bring 2 cups of water to boil. Cook green beans until

cooked through. Prepare Athenian Spice Mix according to directions on bag. Drain green beans, return to pot and add ½ cup of spice mixture to beans, toss to coat. Serve.

### Mona Lisa Potato Bake

#### Ingredients

- 6 to 8 potatoes, cut up
- 1 package Magnificent Mona Lisa Spice Mix
- ½ cup olive oil

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Peel and cut up potatoes. Toss with olive oil and Mona Lisa Spice Mix. Bake uncovered in oven for 30 to 40 minutes until potatoes are cooked. Serve.

(Can top with shredded cheese after potatoes are cooked and bake for additional 5 minutes or until cheese melts.)

Source: Evelyn's *Elegant Edibles*

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