



FOOD & DRINK

Let's Eat: Vatrushka baker brings a little Russian sweetness to morning markets



Let's Eat

By Victoria Davis | Special to The Capital Times Oct 1, 2018  3 min to read





Vatrushka: Eastern European Sweets

(Through Oct. 28) Monroe Street Farmers' Market: Edgewood High School, 2219 Monroe St., Sunday 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

(Through Oct. 28) Monona Farmers' Market: Ahuska Park, 400 E. Broadway, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

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Despite the creamy contour of her chocolate meringues and glazed looks of the popular Geese Feet cookies, sugar and frosting are not the key ingredients in Olga Aydinyan's Eastern European pastries.

Instead, egg whites, cheese and butter make up the foundation of Aydinyan's baked creations, which pay homage to her "international family."

"I've always wanted in my life to not only be good at what I do, but I wanted to create something truly special and have a business of my own," said Aydinyan, founder of Vatrushka: Eastern European Sweets. "I've always loved

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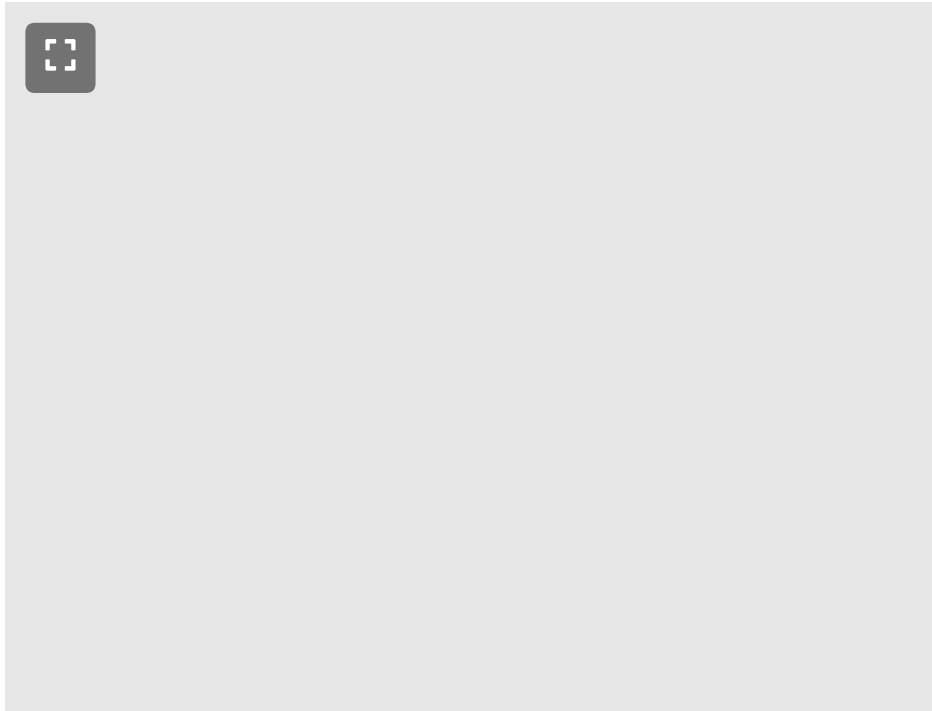
preparing food for other people. And it didn't have to be baking. But who doesn't love baked goods?"

In May, Aydinyan began vending on Sunday mornings at the Monroe Street and Monona farmers' markets. She already has regular customers among both Madison natives and those who immigrated from Eastern European countries like Hungary, Bulgaria and Ukraine.

Pastry lovers who frequent Aydinyan's bright orange booth have even begun putting in requests of their own.

"Many of my customers come up to me and say, 'Oh, thank you for the memories,'" said Aydinyan. "For me, it's not

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Customers sample a ricotta torte and chocolate meringues from Vatrushka, a baker of Eastern European sweets.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA DAVIS

about profit, it's about the satisfaction it gives you, giving other people sweets and memories.”

Born in Belarus, Aydinyan moved to Russia with her Polish mother and Armenian father when she was only four months old. Both of her sisters were born in Russia and Aydinyan's husband is Lithuanian. This colorful mix of tradition is at the core of Aydinyan's hybrid baking.

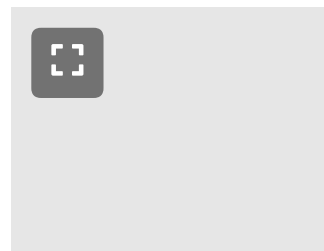


The light and fluffy chocolate meringue is filled with dark chocolate chips and tastes like a powdered s'more.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA DAVIS

“I’d take a particular dessert that I remembered from my childhood and would search like ten different recipes and pick what I liked best from each of them,” said Aydinyan. “I like healthy baking, but in the old-fashioned sense. I want people to just enjoy what they’re eating, without worrying about counting every bite they take.”

When Aydinyan moved to Wisconsin 11 years ago, she would have cooking sessions with her mother over Skype. In this way, she learned how to make the desserts of her childhood, including “Royal Vatrushka.” This ricotta torte is what inspired Aydinyan to start Vatrushka, her labor of love.



Vatrushka makes European sweets and sets them out for samples at farmers' markets in Monona and on Monroe Street.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA DAVIS

“We would visit my grandmother every summer in Belarus, and she had a neighbor who would make this dessert,” said Aydinyan. “I was so crazy about it, and eventually my mother got the recipe. I would smell her baking it and it was like, ‘Oh my gosh, something magical is happening!’”

Aydinyan’s mother would let the cheesy dessert sit overnight, “torturing” her daughter’s taste buds. The next morning, it became a sweet breakfast treat for Aydinyan before she went to school.

After making the same dessert for her children’s daycare



The dough for geese feet cookies is made with farmer's cheese, butter, flour and eggs.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA DAVIS

and seeing its appeal to kids as well as adults, Aydinyan's Royal Vatrushka (\$4) is front and center at her booth. It shares a space with decadent cherry almond muffins (\$4) and waffle delights (\$4), the latter filled with egg whites and syrup.

"Those are my favorite," said Nelli Aydinyan, Olga's younger sister, who assisted in Vatrushka's sales at the Willy Street

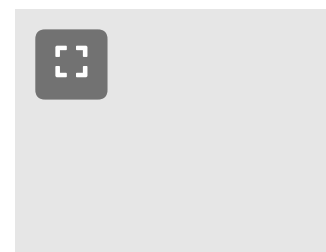
Fair. “I’ve been trying to stay away from them, so there’s some left for the customers.”

The booth’s most popular item seemed to be the Geese Feet cookies (\$2), a Russian pastry named for a shape that evokes the webbed foot of a water bird. But most of her customers under four feet tall have their eyes immediately drawn to the light and fluffy chocolate meringue (\$4).

This airy cookie, based off Russia’s popular Pavlova meringue, is filled with dark chocolate chips and tastes like a powdered s’more. It melts in the mouth almost as fast as cotton candy.

“Two things never lie: kids and the yummy noises,” said Aydinyan.

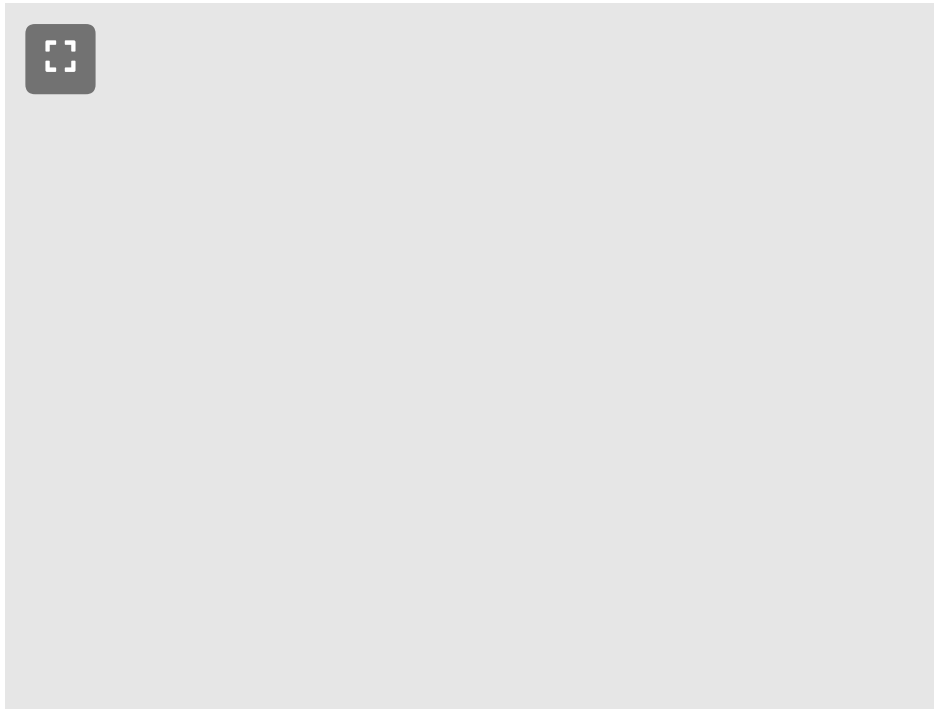
“Kids are the best indicator for a baking business. They will never pretend to like something when they don’t. ... I’ve been hearing a lot of yummy noises from these kids.”



“Two things never lie: kids and the yummy noises,” said Olga Aydinyan of Vatrushka, a new bakery. “Kids are the best indicator for a baking business.”

PHOTO BY VICTORIA DAVIS

For customers looking for something with more of a tart flavor, the Apricots in a Blanket (\$2) have almost a lemony kick. With a mashed apricot filling, the biscuit is glazed with egg yolk and sprinkled with brown sugar. The dessert is sweet with a slightly sour zest. It would make for a perfect Thanksgiving appetizer or dessert.



Vatrushka's Apricots in a Blanket (\$2) have almost a lemony kick.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA DAVIS

“I figured that one would be popular here,” said Aydinyan of the Apricots in a Blanket. “The one that surprised me most was the Geese Feet. I went to Russia last January and bought a whole bunch of those cookies, just stuffing my face with them. I was pleasantly surprised that everyone else here found them as yummy as I do.”

These pastries have roots in her history, interpreted for her Wisconsin clientele. Every week Aydinyan evokes memories (and provokes “yummy noises”) with her hybrid creations with love and passion put into each recipe.

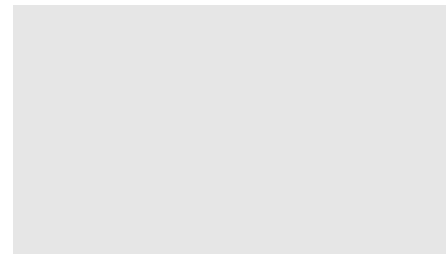
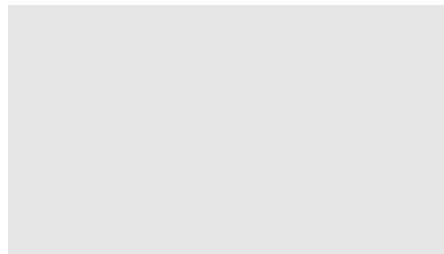
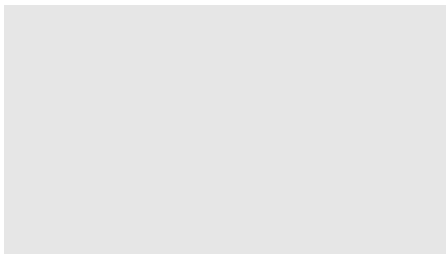
“I feel like with cooking, especially with baking, you have to have this love and passion while you’re creating,” said Aydinyan. “There’s some kind of magic trick to it. It always makes the food taste so much better.”



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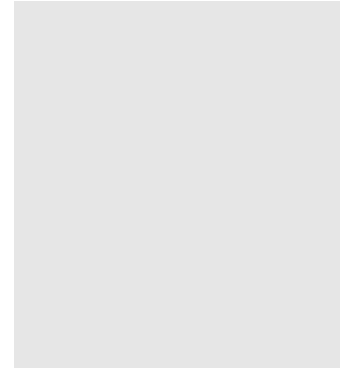
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