



TASTY SQUEEZE

The county's first juice bar opens in downtown Irwin.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

Irwin native Jen Wirsing is on a mission to improve the collective wellness of the community she serves, one squeeze at a time.

On Aug. 7, Wirsing opened The Green Berry, the first designated juice bar in Westmoreland County. The shop, which is located at 209 3rd Street in downtown Irwin, serves cold-pressed juices, smoothies and other seasonal foods, as well as hefty doses of information and education about the health benefits of eating whole foods.

“This is not just a business for me,” says Wirsing, who graduated from Norwin in 1999. “I want to provide the community with information about the benefits of eating real, nutritious foods.”

Wirsing graduated from the Institute for Integrated Nutrition in 2011 and is a board-certified holistic health coach. She’s been a proponent of healthy eating and clean living since 2005. At the time, she was living in Florida, where juice bars and healthy eating are not just prevalent, but the norm. Upon moving back to the area in 2012, she found a work-from-home job in real estate, but she says she knew it wasn’t her passion. She began toying with the idea of opening a juice bar.

Fast-forward to January of 2015, when a small, empty storefront on Third Street in downtown Irwin caught her eye. She thought it would make a perfect cozy spot for a juice bar. Friends suggested that if she was going to open a juice bar, she should do so in a bigger town like Greensburg, but Wirsing was determined to build her business in Irwin.

“I grew up in Irwin and my dad was a firefighter for the borough. I knew this is where I wanted to be,” she says. “I knew a place like this could draw people in from outside the area, and I wanted to be a part of helping downtown Irwin grow.”

She drove by the empty space many times and eventually spoke with the landlord. Still, she was hesitant to make a commitment. That all changed on Valentine’s Day when her husband presented her with the key to the store on a heart-shaped key ring, along with a freshly signed lease.

“I was shocked, because now it was real and I had to follow through with it. It was no longer just an idea,” she says.

At first, Wirsing relied on the support of family and friends, as well as fundraisers and crowd funding, to raise money. Her husband Russ completed most of the remodeling tasks on his own, in his spare time.

“We started with zero dollars,” she says. “And a lot of people told me I couldn’t ask people for money to open a business. But the response was overwhelming — before I knew it, I had raised enough money to open.”



Customer response has been “tremendous,” she says. On opening day, there was a steady rush of patrons throughout the day — a fervor that continued all through the opening weekend.

Popular menu items include the “Coconutty Monkey,” which is a mix of banana, vanilla, coconut milk, unsweetened coconut flakes and spinach, and the “Over the Rainbow,” which includes chard, orange, mango and orange essential oil. Wirsing and her team will custom-make any concoction a customer wants, she says.

Hemp and whey proteins can be added to any smoothie for extra staying power, and she also sells nutrient-packed “shots” of wheat grass or a tumeric-ginger-lemon mix.

“We designed the menu so that every single item will appeal either to those who know exactly what they want, or those who’ve never tried juicing before,” she explains.

The majority of the produce Wirsing uses is sourced locally from farms such as Morris Organic Farm in Irwin and Two Acre Organics in Latrobe. Out of season, she’ll continue work with food suppliers to ensure that all of her produce is certified organic and GMO-free.

Wirsing says she shies away from the “politically correct” version of nutrition, which often promotes the consumption of low-fat, low-calorie foods.

“We don’t worry about counting calories or how much fat is in a food. We tell our

customers, ‘When you’re eating real, whole foods, you don’t have to worry about that,’” she says.

The Green Berry offers health and nutritional counseling, as well as guided juice cleanses. In addition, Wirsing also offers private and group consults on essential oils and herbal skin and body care. This winter, the shop will be selling homemade bone broth by the mason jar; all of the bones for the broth are provided by Smail Farms, which raises hormone-free, grass-fed beef. Wirsing also plans on selling her homemade almond milk by the mason jar and incorporating healthy treats, hot teas and coffee into the menu in future months.

“It’s exciting to see the power that these foods have to change people’s lives,” she says. “They’re learning how fun and how pretty healthy food can be.”

For more information about The Green Berry, visit facebook.com/thegreenberry or call 724.771.9993. ■

