



ARRESTINGLY GOOD DONUTS!



Christine
NORDSTROM
CEO at Five-O Donut Co.

She's the owner and creator of Five-Donuts in Sarasota which, despite the pandemic, has expanded from the Ringling location to two more stores and she's adding a fourth store at the UTC mall in early 2022. The Johnson & Wales' grad has experienced rapid growth of her premium brand, gourmet donuts that have legions of loyal customers.

Surely the donut survived the pandemic. It's recession-proof and it's survived all the no carb/gluten-free diet trends. And besides, who doesn't love donuts? So we asked the donut maven herself what the pandemic was like for her business, Five-O Donuts in Sarasota. How did she survive? And how is she doing now?

When the pandemic was in full swing Christine explains that she actually had to hire more people due in part to switching to curbside pick-up and upping delivery. But using delivery services was challenging - business owners have to fork over 30% for food delivery service and they're not "easily interfaced," as she explains. For example, if you go online, you may see a type of donut you want, but in reality it may have just sold out. Such is the nature of a product with high demand, but limited quantity. Hassles aside, Five-O Donuts still offers delivery via Uber Eats, Door Dash, Grubhub, and Bite Squad.

Christine brought back limited seating this past June and staff continue to wear masks. She also uses special HEPA filters to clean the air in all her stores.

There have been some challenges, her words are, "near altercations" about masks and she had to turn away business because some refused to mask up coming in. Christine, however, felt it would be uncomfortable to ask people coming in if they were vaccinated.

Her Ringling location has very limited space and it wasn't possible to maintain a six-foot separation. Siesta Row (opened in 2020) has more space and a safe distance can be maintained, and the south trail location - her largest - is much easier to maintain a safe distance.

In reality, she admits she did "surprisingly well during covid." So much so that a fourth store is coming later this year at the University Town Center mall.

Prior to Five-O, in 2010 Christine started a retail business called Sift Bakehouse in downtown Sarasota where she made and sold small batch baked goods from scratch. She also operated a Startup Cafe inside Sarasota Ford and was the managing partner of the HuB Startup Cafe. For two years (2007-2009) she ran Wired Whisk (across the road from Walt's Fish Market) where she sold retail and wholesale and was also selling at numerous farmer's markets.

In October, 2019 she closed the retail part and went to a "commissary/orders and events and farmer's market only operation," according to her Facebook page. Why? Her new Five-O Donuts stores were taking off and she was juggling too many locations.

So the decision was made to focus on donuts even though Sift's birthday and wedding cakes, judging by the Facebook comments, were adored by many. When given a free hand, her cakes were over-the-top with M&Ms pouring out of them while others had a meteor shower of peanut butter cups, Oreos, Hershey kisses and yes, donuts, dug deep into the icing.

Early in her career here Christine sold her baked goods at numerous farmer's markets—Sarasota, Bonita Springs, Sanibel Island, Boca Grande, Largo, Englewood, Phillippi Farmhouse Market, Fort Myers, Cape Coral, Lakes Park and Punta Gorda.

At one point she was selling at 15 markets and then launched Sift retail in 2015. When Five-O opened she had four other business ventures running. "It was stepping over dollars to pick up pennies," she recounts and thus scaled back her operations.

Christine earned a four-year degree in Culinary Arts from the prestigious Johnson & Wales College in Providence, Rhode Island. According to her website, "Christine fell into her calling as a pastry chef during her time spent at Napa

Valley Grill, where she discovered where her true passion and talents lie."

If driving from Largo to Sanibel and running a retail organization was not enough, Christine is also single mom to two children, Annika and Ian. She'd bring them to work with her six days a week while she baked. Dinner was in the freezer at the bakery, they'd eat, and then go home.

Annika graduated this past June and is headed to New College this fall. "I'm so proud of this Prew Academy Valedictorian... It's not easy being the daughter of a workaholic single mom, but her drive, independence and integrity will take her far," she wrote on the Five-O Facebook page she manages (which also has 21,000 plus likes and 22,000 followers).

Like many startups, the owner usually does it all. Christine does payroll, marketing, leases and social media. "Right now, I'm way less a pastry chef than a business woman." As she sees it, "I create a position, I perfect it and then bring someone in." One role, however, she always kept for herself. For over 10 years she didn't do retail (a storefront) so she could raise her kids, feeling it important to "be there and be available" to them. She has tinkered with her many start ups and ventures usually growing them only to have them morph into a new business. A scaled back operation has Five-O still baking for a few restaurants and selling at the Sarasota Farmer's Market. "I had to learn to say no," is her honest self-assessment.

Five-O, by the way, is American slang for law enforcement. It's also a throwback to Hawaii Five-O, an American television police drama that ran from 1968 to 1980. In these contentious times, her brand's name was seen by some as being a pro police stance (in the wake of the George Floyd murder) when nothing could be further from the truth. Christine states she received some misguided blowback, but it had no lasting damage and certainly didn't slow her ambition and drive one bit. In fact, Christine always donates donuts to the Sarasota Police Department on National Donut Day and they give her a big thank you on their own Facebook page.

It was also in 2020 that she lost her dad to brain cancer. She calls the pandemic, the flack about her store's name, and losing her dad as a "whole dark year." As a self-funded, single mom she says she has "walked the fire with Five-O." And she wisely stayed focused and channeled her energy into growing her business.

As a prelude to opening her fourth store, Christine has hired a director of operations and, when we met to take her photos, she was on her way to the airport to begin a long vacation with her kids out west.

Now to the serious part. Five-O sells fritters, glazed, chocolate, gluten-free, filled donuts, croissants, Long Johns and an ever-changing array of filled, topped donuts. They use local Dakin Dairy products and locally roasted coffee.

She offers "simple" or "fancy" donuts. You can get six "plain" donuts that only sets you back \$10. Go all "fancy" (i.e. chocolate croissants, banana peanut butter filled) and it's \$20. Be forewarned or delighted: the donuts are large. Her stores are open 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. or when sold out.

Next up is Five-O Donut Co. at University Town Center mall. It'll be her company's fourth doughnut shop and will open possibly later this year or in early 2022 near Target and Chipotle. It will also be her first location with evening hours. Christine is a go-getter so expect a lot more in the future from this hard-working entrepreneur. 🍩

► **Five-O Donut Company**
Downtown: 2241 Ringling Blvd, Sarasota
Siesta Row: 3800 S. Tamiami Trail
South Trail: 7119 S. Tamiami Trail
Coming later in 2021/early 2022: UTC Mall
<http://www.fivedonutco.com/>

☞ STORY: Louise Bruderle
☞ IMAGE: Evelyn England