

Eric & Denise Steilberger with Fudge DE Fûge

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill and today I'm talking with Eric and Denise Steilberger.

[00:00:11] But before we begin, I want to thank Castiron for sponsoring this episode. Eric and Denise love using Castiron for their online store and right now Castiron has this crazy new year pricing special where you can try it for free and then pay only \$1 per month for the rest of this year.

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[00:00:53] All right, so I have Eric and Denise on the show today. They live in Ocala, Florida and sell fudge with their cottage food business, Fudge DE Fûge. Now I must say, I'm really excited to finally have a fudge business on the show. As you may know, I also sell fudge with my cottage food business, and I've always thought that fudge only sells well during the holidays.

[00:01:17] But Eric and Denise have proven me wrong. They sell fudge all year long, and they sell a lot of fudge to their loyal customers. In this episode, you're going to love hearing their very unique story, as well as a lot of great business advice. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Eric and Denise. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:41] **Eric Steilberger:** Thank you. Nice to be here.

[00:01:43] **Denise Steilberger:** Yes, it is. Thank you.

[00:01:44] **David Crabill:** So can you guys take me back? How did this journey get started for you?

[00:01:48] **Eric Steilberger:** Well I have, uh, been making fudge since I was probably seven years old. Uh, I used to make it with my mom twice a year made it up until basically the year that she died which was 13 years ago, I believe. and we just wanted to be able to do something together and. And we've always been involved with food, so I thought, well, let's, let's see how a fudge business would work.

[00:02:12] And, uh, that's where we are now.

[00:02:14] **David Crabill:** As you know, I also make fudge and I've made it ever since I was a young kid too. So it's cool to hear that there's a similar parallel story there. And so, you decided to start a fudge business and can you take me through that? Like, how did it look in the early days?

[00:02:31] **Eric Steilberger:** We owned a restaurant in Alaska, that was 15 years ago, so we sold fudge there. My mom and I used to make a certain flavor, it was chocolate butterscotch. So we just had a few flavors up in Alaska. And then when we came here, I wanted to do it, but, you know, I had to expand the amount of flavors.

[00:02:47] just a lot of experimentation possibly the hardest part was trying to find the, packaging and the labeling and all that kind of technical stuff. But you know, it's kind of fun making new flavors and, and seeing how uh, people enjoy them.

[00:03:01] **David Crabill:** So I know you've moved to Florida now, but in Alaska this restaurant, was this a restaurant that you two started?

[00:03:08] **Denise Steilberger:** Yes it was a cafe, actually, we started it together. the opportunity came up for us to be able to rent the space, so we did. we had a really fun time with it. We uh, sold all types of different food. we gave it then flavor names of the region we were in. So, when we made fudge, we made caribou, we called it caribou fudge, which really was nothing more than rocky road.

[00:03:31] But because we called it caribou fudge, it sold like crazy. Skagway is a deep water port. So you get anywhere from

[00:03:41] **Eric Steilberger:** what? We get up to 11, 000 people a day coming in off the ships, and it's a very small town. And there's not a lot of restaurants in town, so we did really well, and people enjoyed the fudge.

[00:03:52] **David Crabill:** What led you to starting or buying this cafe in the first place?

[00:03:58] **Eric Steilberger:** Well, since we both worked in restaurants, it's always my, one of my dreams was to own a little restaurant. We had the opportunity, and, uh, and I particularly jumped at it. But we both did, obviously, but, you know, something that We wanted to do, and we did it.

[00:04:12] **David Crabill:** And how long did you run that cafe for?

[00:04:15] **Eric Steilberger:** Two years?

[00:04:17] **David Crabill:** Well, it's just interesting because most people who start, they start with the cottage food realm, right? If they're, if they're on the show, they usually start with cottage food and then maybe upgrade into a brick and mortar, but it's very cool to see that you started your journey with a brick and mortar and you weren't necessarily trying to do anything cottage food related at the time, or were you, were you starting it also with the hope of making it into a fudge business as well?

[00:04:40] **Eric Steilberger:** No, I don't think so. I just, no, I saw an opportunity. I thought, even though they can eat on the ship for free, they still want to come into town. Just like we do when we go somewhere, we want to eat something local. So we thought, well, you know, it's a good audience.

[00:04:55] That many people coming off. Uh, The ships and, we just thought we could do well there, which we did. you know, we were accepted by the locals. Canadians uh, drove down and enjoyed the food and everything, and my wife's a great cook, so she did all the cooking there. And really, I think the only thing I did there was make the fudge.

[00:05:12] I think she made everything else. And I made chili I did more baking there. made homemade cinnamon rolls, which Alaska takes great pride in their cinnamon rolls. I didn't know that when I decided I was going to make homemade cinnamon rolls.

[00:05:25] **Denise Steilberger:** But evidently they did well and you kind of have to train your customers somehow and I think that is important to understand in the food business that we do have to train our customers. For instance, where the cinnamon rolls were concerned I would make of them in the morning.

[00:05:42] And that's all I would make. And then I would market that as 24, come get them before they're gone. And people really began to like them. So the locals would know that if they wanted to get the cinnamon rolls, they had to get there early before the ship, people came or they wouldn't get any.

[00:05:59] And then I'd make 24 more in the afternoon, but I didn't have them available all day long. So it made them very desirable.

[00:06:06] So, we look at it the same way in any business, you do have to train your customers. they need to be trained because most of the time they honestly don't know what they want. They just know they want something.

[00:06:17] **David Crabill:** So you wanted to start, or Eric at least you did, wanted to start some kind of cafe, restaurant, food business for a while. What was it like once you were actually in it? Did it match your expectations? I mean, what surprised you and were you Satisfied once you got into the business that we're running day in and day out.

[00:06:40] **Eric Steilberger:** I loved it. I think we both loved it. I love the town, it's a beautiful town up there beautiful people. But yeah, I don't think there was anything uh, that I wasn't expecting. I knew it'd be some hard work. But no, we, we knew enough to keep it simple. We knew enough to just have the two of us as employees and.

[00:06:59] And somebody else helping us. you know, we knew that we wanted to keep it small. and we did well. And that's really, I just wanted to see if I could do it myself. You know, if I was smart enough and if we both knew marketing well enough. To be able to do it and I think we blew it out of the water and then we did something

[00:07:14] **Denise Steilberger:** else.

[00:07:15] Went back to a

[00:07:16] restaurant. We

[00:07:17] **Eric Steilberger:** went back, yeah, that was, we went back to corporate restaurants after that. and I had a great time. We wouldn't change it for anything. And then, when we both moved back to Florida, we didn't necessarily want to get real jobs again, per se we thought, well, what can we do together where we can both enjoy something that we're doing and, uh, make some money.

[00:07:33] So uh, while a restaurant would be great I don't think uh, Ocala, which is where we live, you know, there's not a surefire way of getting that many people coming on to a seven. Block Street, you know, like there was in Skagway. So I was a little bit hesitant about doing that but I thought, well, fudge, this is a year round climate down here, and there's enough of farmer's markets around here that you could sell fudge year round.

[00:07:56] pretty much, you know, if you wanted to, five days a week, there's enough markets here. We don't live too far away from the largest flea market in the state. So, we're having a great

[00:08:05] **Denise Steilberger:** time so far.

[00:08:05] **David Crabill:** So Denise, you had said that you learned to train your customers with the cafe. What were some other things that you took from the cafe experience and brought into this new cottage food business of yours in Florida?

[00:08:21] **Denise Steilberger:** one thing that I really learned is that you can't be afraid to try, you know. I think that's really important. if you go into something thinking that you're going to fail, then chances are you're going to fail. But if you go into it with just thinking, oh, you know, why don't I just try this?

[00:08:37] **And see how it turns out.** And so I think I really took away from the cafe that here we were in a place that we knew very little about their culture. And when they say Alaska is the last frontier, they truly mean that. It's a whole different culture. And it's in this particular town sits right on the Canadian border.

[00:08:56] So, you know, we knew very little about what would work and what wouldn't work. The marketing was very scarce because everything is so spread out. So we just tried things we locked into, we talked to some of our local people and asked them what they thought they would like. And I think that's really important is knowing your demographics and knowing your market, I think from all of that, it made me just really dive into the fudge business with Eric because honestly, I, I didn't really know much about. The fudge business per se at all. And I knew nothing about cottage food. it was interesting and fun. We've had fun.

[00:09:31] **Eric Steilberger:** One of the things that we do is like, We'll have no problems. If somebody comes up and goes, Hey, can you make this type of

fudge? You know, and we'll both say, yeah, you know, give us a week and we'll figure it out for you and we'll have it here next week. So, you know, there's been plenty of fudge that we've made that. It was because somebody asked us to make it and it usually takes me, three, four, five, six times before I like it.

[00:09:49] And I think it's, you know, they're going to like it, but, I get everything made.

[00:09:52] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah. We come out of a restaurant backgrounds, both of us, we have extensive restaurant backgrounds. And one thing I think that both Eric and I have a passion about is that if you come to our restaurant. And you see something on the menu that perhaps you want to have it tweaked a little bit.

[00:10:07] For instance, maybe it's a shrimp dish, but you asking, can you have chicken instead of shrimp? We will never tell you no because we already have all of those components in our restaurant. So there would be no reason why we would have to tell you, no, you can't have that. So I think that. There is very little reason to ever tell your customer, no.

[00:10:27] we many times we'll say, well, we don't know if we can make it, but we'll try. And you know, they appreciate that.

[00:10:32] **David Crabill:** I did see a post of yours where you said your motto is like the answer is always yes. What's the question? that's classic, like, people pleaser type of statement. Right. And I found that a lot of times entrepreneurs, they say yes so much that they can get overwhelmed. You know have you ever noticed that you say yes too much sometimes, or Is there any like kind of boundaries that you set around that?

[00:10:59] **Denise Steilberger:** Of course there does have to be boundaries. You know, you, if you know, absolutely something is, you know, way beyond perhaps your scope of being able to, you know, like I'm not a chocolatier, I see beautiful chocolate, figurines and things like that. I don't have that ability and it wouldn't really matter how much I'd want to do that for you.

[00:11:19] Trust me, you would not recognize it if I did. So, yes, you have to know your, your limitations and your boundaries, but I do believe that if you have all of the ingredients. And I think that's mostly what people ask us in the fudge business. They'll ask us, can you make this? And so we'll say, Sure, we'll give it a try.

[00:11:39] We you know, we've never made it before but we would we would be willing to try it and you know, they respect that and if it doesn't turn out well they respect that too, because you did say you only were going to try it. I think that if we can please our customers, we absolutely should please our customers.

[00:11:55] what did we make, babe, that didn't come out very well? Dairy, was it dairy

[00:11:59] **Eric Steilberger:** free? Yeah, we made some, you know, we've had a few people ask for dairy free fudge. I mean, I made it and it just, no matter how many times I made it, to me it just didn't taste right. So we just stopped doing dairy free.

[00:12:10] You know, until one of these days maybe I can figure out how to do it better. But everything else, though, do pretty well, I think.

[00:12:15] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, you're talking about the cafe and just how you knocked it out of the park and it was an amazing experience and jumping into this cottage food fudge business in Florida. And I know. There's always challenges, there's always obstacles to overcome, right, in any business.

[00:12:34] What were some of the challenges that you faced when you were running the cafe or also when you were trying to get the fudge business off the ground in Florida?

[00:12:42] **Eric Steilberger:** The fudge business in Florida, as you well know, fudge is affected by the weather quite a bit. in Alaska as well, it rains a lot. that affects the fudge. But Alaska, we, I don't think we really had any issues at all. Just, it seemed like everything just went very smoothly.

[00:12:58] Other than, you know, like license and stuff like that. But luckily there, I just walked to the place to get my license and, you know, they would help me. Here, you know, it's emails and everything like that. But I think it's just the weather plays a tricky part on it sometimes.

[00:13:11] Uh, With the humidity and stuff, I think another challenge in the fudge business is waste. you have to really understand your market and you also have to understand how to curb the waste because, we keep our fudge as fresh as possible.

[00:13:26] **Denise Steilberger:** We don't, freeze it. We don't like to do things to it, to alter it. that's a challenge. It's a challenge. Anytime you're dealing with the unknown. Markets in food, it's challenging.

[00:13:37] It's different when you're commercial, but with cottage food law I wanted to make chocolate bacon fudge, but I didn't want to use fake bacon. I wanted to use bacon in my fudge, but you can't use bacon in your fudge.

[00:13:49] So to me, that was a little disappointing and challenging. So I went online and I found a vegan recipe for vegan bacon. Now, it was very interesting it was really just a series of different types of spices and nuts that you crushed and combined. To give it a, bacon texture and flavor. And actually we, we sold it quite well, we really did.

[00:14:13] It surprised me. And like I said, it was disappointing because, you know, we'd go into shops and they'd have all of these gorgeous, you know, strips of chocolate bacon and everything. And I'm like, well, we could do that. Well, no, we can't. So, you know, there are limitations And I see people say this a lot of times on the cottage food sites, and I understand there are limitations to what you can and cannot do and use in the food.

[00:14:38] And so that's challenging for me.

[00:14:40] **Eric Steilberger:** But there's a good reason for that too, so

[00:14:42] **Denise Steilberger:** we understand that. Yeah, we understand it, but it doesn't always mean I have to like it.

[00:14:48] **Eric Steilberger:** one thing that's challenging to me is uh, unfortunately with fudge, you have to make samples.

[00:14:53] So I probably spend more time making samples than I do making the fudge. and I spend a lot of time making fudge. that would probably be the most challenging thing for me is just spending the time and just sitting down for.

[00:15:08] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I understand that because I, I self fudge too. And I was wondering how do you do the samples because it is a very time consuming thing.

[00:15:17] **Eric Steilberger:** get the fudge and I'll cut it down to, 8. 1, 8. 2, 8. 3 ounces. And I'll get my amount of fudge that I can get out of a one times batch

and then everything else is samples. So I just sit there and just cut small samples and then they have to go into portion cups with lids on them.

[00:15:36] that's a lot, a lot of time because, like, we'll do a festival and, you know, we'll go through uh, I don't know, a thousand samples, but that takes a lot of time to do a

[00:15:44] **Denise Steilberger:** thousand samples. And when we do our samples, of course, we, we are really big on keeping everything as sanitary as possible, so, and a lot of that is just really, again, our restaurant training, but it's also, we want to keep our customers safe, so we have them in enclosed little portion cups, which I call fudge shots.

[00:16:03] People always laugh about that, but they're like little shot cups. And so we, put them in there and we, you know, make sure we bring everything that we take to the market enclosed already, because that's how Florida cottage food lie is. I don't, I don't know about the rest of it, but you know, it's supposed to be made in your kitchen.

[00:16:20] There's a lot of different words. There's a lot of different things that you can label in your thought. And to know how many samples of what fudge, you don't really know when you're at a festival what fudge is going to do well, what, Like we're coming up on a festival now, which will be a strawberry festival.

[00:16:38] the strawberry festival You know, we make strawberry fudge and we make strawberry cheesecake fudge So, of course, we know that those two are going to sell at a strawberry festival so we've done that for two years. This will be our third year first year we sold a lot of strawberry fudge.

[00:16:54] Last year we sold hardly any strawberry fudge. We sold all, all different types of fudge last year. So you know, there's about 22, how many people attend the strawberry, about

[00:17:04] **Eric Steilberger:** 20, I don't know, 10, 000 people. That's

[00:17:07] **Denise Steilberger:** a huge. No, I think it was 20 last year. They doubled it. COVID was the year before. It's a, it's a pretty big festival.

[00:17:14] Yeah. And then we have a blueberry festival that's two days. Which is huge. Which is huge. And we always do well though, that's a given for blueberry. They love their blueberries. So, we do blueberry fudge and blueberry

cheesecake fudge. And blueberry lemon fudge. Oh yeah, blueberry lemon, yeah. Yeah, that's, that's a big one too. So we do about seven different markets. Well, we used to. Yeah, we used to, yeah. And each one of them is very different, But I think it's very important we're learning more and more at the cottage food level to understand your demographics, you know, and to, like I was a field trainer for a corporation, so, you know, that part, I'm very comfortable with the training part but I never did a lot of marketing, so, you know, marketing was a real challenge for me when we started the business because I was on social media, but I was only on it like as a Facebook person to keep up with a friend every now and then.

[00:18:09] So I still and I, I still am seeking the counsel of a friend who's very good at doing that and Meta business is forever changing, constantly changing, and I find that very challenging. We are on Google, and so Google, we do really well with Google. People contact us quite a bit through Google and our Facebook followers are picking up.

[00:18:31] So the marketing aspect of it, to me, is challenging, because you have to always constantly be aggressive with it. One thing that I have found, which I was so against in the beginning, when I started my business page, the only thing I wanted on there was about my business. I didn't want anything else on there.

[00:18:50] However, I am beginning to understand that. People are interested not only in your business, they're interested in you. So a connection, if you can make a connection with your customers on a more personal level, and I'm not talking about sharing personal things, of course, but you know, maybe, you know, a picture of my dog or, you know, something that's not too personal.

[00:19:09] They really can connect with you that way and it tends to make them want to buy fudge from you.

[00:19:15] **David Crabill:** So you said you've been successful with Google is that just the Google my business thing?

[00:19:22] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah, it's Google My Business,

[00:19:25] **David Crabill:** you learned anything about that?

[00:19:28] **Denise Steilberger:** well, yes, you have to constantly answer any questions within a certain time frame on Google. It's not like you can get back to somebody in two days, which you wouldn't want to anyway, but, it all affects

your, your listing. So Google is a bit of a challenge, but not as challenging as some of the other TikTok, I could not maneuver TikTok.

[00:19:48] I'm sorry. It's just it's beyond me. It really is. we cross posted Facebook Instagram. And Google. So I think that's pretty much what we're on now. Oh, Nextdoor. We do Nextdoor. but yeah, the marketing, to me, well, it's not as challenging. Castiron has helped us so much.

[00:20:07] I mean, we, we honestly. The Castiron website and the Castiron team, when we started this business, we didn't know anything about websiting, how to create a website or anything, we honestly could not have done it without them, it would have been so laborious and so overwhelming for us.

[00:20:24] So really have a lot of respect for Castiron and their team. Mark Josephson, he's been so supportive, they're great, they really are.

[00:20:31] **David Crabill:** Well, I see that you're also pretty active on Facebook, and am I hearing that you just don't get quite as much traction from Facebook as you do from Google?

[00:20:44] **Denise Steilberger:** We didn't, recently we've started to get much more traction from Facebook. Now that, you know, I'm beginning to understand about algorithms and things like that, which, you know, I've had to learn. So it's been a learning curve for me. That type of marketing is so different than, you know, me sitting in doing food orders in a restaurant or, you know, controlling my uh, controllables or anything like that, in a spreadsheet.

[00:21:07] So it's been a, it's been an interesting challenge, but I like the challenge. I really do. It's really stretches you but again, the majority, I guess, I don't know if Eric agrees with this. I think he does. The majority of our business comes from word of mouth, because we are firm believers that if you can get the product in someone's hand, have them taste it, if they like it, Not only are they going to buy it, they're going to tell their friends about it. And that's the most credible advertising you can have, is because they've tried it, they like it, and they're recommending it to their friends.

[00:21:40] **Eric Steilberger:** And that's where the samples come in, obviously, is, you know, when we first started, I would, you know, write everything down.

[00:21:45] So, you know, I'd write down how many samples I gave away and how many pieces of fudge I'd give away or how many pieces of fudge I would sell and stuff like that. And there'd be days we'd be at markets, you know, and,

people would come and have a sample and there'd be days where, you know, 55, 58, 60 people would buy a piece of fudge after they had the sample.

[00:22:03] And, you know, that, that wasn't like a one time thing that would happen constantly.

[00:22:07] **David Crabill:** So you're saying like 90 something percent of the people who tried it would buy?

[00:22:12] **Eric Steilberger:** Yeah. you know, and that's not always the case and, you know, not every market is the same, but there's quite a few markets that are like that. And then some people would just come up and go, Eric, what do you think is the best one this day? And I go, well, you know, the, the panucci, I don't know, I don't know what I did to the panucci, but man, that turned out really good.

[00:22:28] Okay. I'll take two of those. You know, they wouldn't even buy any, but, you know, they, they, I'm sorry, they wouldn't taste it. You know, and they would trust us enough to know, which one was tasting better for whatever reason that day.

[00:22:40] **Denise Steilberger:** But Eric has a great thing he does and it's a cool marketing ploy, but it's also a funny thing. When we're in the market, he'll see someone wearing, let's say, a hat from Cincinnati and he'll, he'll holler out, Come get your Cincinnati fudge or whatever and you know, all of a sudden the person will realize, wait a minute, I've got a Cincinnati hat on and they'll turn around and they'll come over and start talking.

[00:23:03] And so it's just kind of a fun thing that we do. We, I think it's important to have fun. we've had fun from the beginning. As a matter of fact, we told ourselves that when it was no longer fun, we didn't want to do it anymore. You know, so I think it's really important that, you know, you don't. Get so serious into it and you don't get so deep into trying to make it work that you forget to just have some fun with it and enjoy your business and enjoy your customers.

[00:23:26] **David Crabill:** So I'm just curious, because, you know, obviously the fudge sold well in Alaska, and then you moved to Florida, and it's a different market of course, completely different. were there any issues with the receptivity of fudge? I mean, I think of fudge as like a cold weather type of product and, you know, obviously Florida is so hot for most of the year.

[00:23:53] So I just was wondering if, if there were any issues with that.

[00:23:56] **Eric Steilberger:** Well, in Alaska, fudge wasn't, was not even close to being the main business as far as the food. We sold ice cream more people in Alaska eat ice cream than anywhere else, at least back then. I don't know what it is now, but it probably still is. I made something called Skagway chili that sold very well, or cinnamon rolls sold very well, or cookies sold very well.

[00:24:17] So fudge was probably, you know, down on the list there. And we didn't. We didn't try to make it, the product. Here while it does get hot in the summer, that is for sure, I am quite surprised that fudge is a year round food. Cause I, I certainly agree with you. You know, I eat more fudge and most people do probably, you know, during Christmas time or around that time.

[00:24:38] But, we certainly don't do as much during the summer, but uh, we do surprisingly well during the summer months. so that does, uh, that does come as a surprise to me.

[00:24:47] **Denise Steilberger:** we have four different markets that are totally different in the respect that in one of our markets, they'll taste a lot and maybe they won't buy a lot.

[00:24:56] And another one of our markets, they choose not to taste, they just want to come to buy. So, again, after you keep doing the same markets over and over, you kind of get a better feel for what your customers are looking for. So I think that really helps too, is, you know, if you can stay consistent in your markets.

[00:25:14] And then you get to really know, you know, your customers much better. We have a lot of snowbirds here. So you know, they'll, it's amazing though we're thankful that we've built enough rapport in the business that when they come back, they look us up. We have very loyal customers. We have a, we have a very loyal customer base that, don't we, Eric?

[00:25:34] **Eric Steilberger:** Yes, we do. Yeah.

[00:25:36] And I think she said something about me, you know, talking to people, you know, wearing a hat or something like that.

[00:25:41] We've traveled extensively across the country, so I can, I'm pretty comfortable. I think we're both pretty comfortable with talking to the majority

of people and just saying, Oh, California, where are you from, we've been to a lot of places in California and the same with all 50 states.

[00:25:56] So I'm, I'm pretty comfortable talking to people about that.

[00:25:59] **Denise Steilberger:** yeah, because I don't think you know our, I don't think we discussed that background part of us. we left our corporate jobs. We traveled in our RV for 10 years and we wanted to see all of the continental United States.

[00:26:12] So we traveled for that 10 years and we do what was called work camping. we would take a job, something we never had done before, and then we would um, spend time there. And a lot of times, you know, they'll offer you, it's a whole network that they do, it's, it's pretty high tech. But we would do that, and so, you asked how we ended up in Alaska, well, that was how we actually ended up in Alaska the first time.

[00:26:35] you know, and then we saw that there was an opportunity to open up a cafe there, there was a space. that's how we opened that cafe. that's kind of like our, our background, our little history.

[00:26:44] **David Crabill:** So I'm just thinking like I guess the fudge was not the primary product that you were selling at the cafe. So when you moved to Florida, why did fudge become the primary thing? Was it just because that's what you could do under the cottage food law?

[00:26:59] **Eric Steilberger:** It's because I think That was what I knew how to do. I don't think we're at the stage now where we wanted to run a restaurant. When we moved, you know, there's quite a few years between Alaska and now. You know, there's, I don't know, 15 years. So uh, I don't want to run a restaurant.

[00:27:15] But I think we still enjoy the food aspect of it. We both like the business. And fudge is one thing I could do. It's either fudge or ice cream. I can make ice cream as well. But fudge was an easier thing to do.

[00:27:27] **Denise Steilberger:** And as far as here in Florida we talked a little bit a few minutes ago about selling fudge here in Florida, you know, with the challenges of the temperature I don't think that's too much of a challenge, as much of a challenge as somebody would think it is here.

[00:27:40] You know, the only time that that's challenging it's for us is if we, we want to ship out somewhere. we don't want it sitting on the dock in 90 degree weather. So we have to use ice packs and a lot of things like that to make sure we can ship it out, but other than that, it's not too challenging.

[00:27:56] It's challenging for us in the month of August on being outside. So that's a challenge for we, the fudge makers, that's

[00:28:05] **Eric Steilberger:** for sure. We seem to wilt faster than the fudge does when it's hot outside, but the worst thing about the fudge and the heat is that, for a while we were doing displays and, cause everybody wants to see the fudge. So you put a piece of fudge out in a hundred degree weather, it doesn't last very long. So it took me a while to figure it out.

[00:28:23] But what we did was we just put the label on a container and fill the container with rocks or little pebbles to make it eight ounces. So when somebody looked at it. And picked it up, they could see what the fudge looked like and they could feel the weight in their hand so that they would know how much they were getting.

[00:28:39] So that, that seemed to have helped us uh, with the main problem in the summertime, which was the display thing.

[00:28:45] **David Crabill:** Yeah, that is fascinating. I did see a photo of your booth and saw all the pictures out, you know, of all the different flavors. And I was, I actually didn't know that you put rocks in it to give people a sense of the weight, but I thought that was a great idea just because allows people to see the product when it's cut and everything, which is something they wouldn't necessarily be able to see when it's in its little package.

[00:29:07] So I thought that was a fantastic idea.

[00:29:10] **Eric Steilberger:** I thought about doing 3D and I think we had quite a few different things that we thought about doing. And in the end we went with the pebbles because that was just, to me, that was just the easiest thing to do.
And

[00:29:22] **Denise Steilberger:** cheaper. Much cheaper. And cheaper, too, yeah. Yeah. There's many things you can do, but again, like any food business, you have to consider keeping your costs down.

[00:29:33] So, you know, we try to be cost conscious of what we're spending and, what we're bringing back in.

[00:29:39] **Eric Steilberger:** And a lot of times when people come up and, you can tell that they're having problems, you know, trying to figure out, you know, what kind of fudge they want.

[00:29:46] I always go, you know, what's your favorite flavor of ice cream? And they'll, and they'll tell me, and then chances are that I've got a flavor that's very similar to that flavor of ice cream. So that's, that always helps us out too.

[00:29:57] **David Crabill:** Well I saw that you do have a lot of different fudge flavors think over 20 now. so what are some of your favorite flavors and some of the best sellers that you have?

[00:30:09] **Eric Steilberger:** we probably have a list of probably 50. We just try not to have all 50 going on at one time. favorite is the one I made with my mom, which is the chocolate butterscotch, which we call Skagway Shirley. My wife's favorite is the Dopio Espresso, which is an espresso flavored fudge. some of the more uh, popular ones are what maybe dark chocolate reesees.

[00:30:31] Mm. Which is dark chocolate with peanut butter. Panucci is kind of a favorite. That's a vanilla fudge with brown

[00:30:37] **Denise Steilberger:** sugar. York. York peppermint patty.

[00:30:40] **Eric Steilberger:** That's a big one. Dark chocolate with York peppermint patties in it.

[00:30:43] **Denise Steilberger:** Southern charm, which is our butter pecan. There's always something for everyone, but you're never going to know what that is on a consistent basis.

[00:30:52] You know, what we sell, a lot of in number, one week could be totally, absolutely different from what we sell the following week.

[00:31:01] **David Crabill:** So, how do you price your fudge?

[00:31:03]

[00:31:04] **Eric Steilberger:** We price it competitively with what everybody else is going with. At least the ones that I see, I think we're all about the same price which is uh, we sell, right now we're selling, uh, 8 ounces for um, 11. Doesn't matter uh, necessarily, uh, where we're at, whether we're at a farmer's market or at a festival, that's what we sell it at.

[00:31:24] And then we'll sell a pound, which is two containers, for 20. that seems to give us enough room profit wise. nothing drastically has changed in our costs right now anyways. But, prices keep going up, that's for sure on everything we're buying. well, I think that's a problem for any cottage food baker is, you know, when do you raise the price?

[00:31:43] And I had that same issue too. You don't want to think that you're charging too much for your product. Just like everybody else who makes cottage food products, there is a lot of time involved and a lot of costs involved.

[00:31:53] So whatever it is that people are charging, I'm sure they're probably. They probably need to charge more, but, uh, are uncomfortable to do that, which is, uh, you know, where I usually am as well. I

[00:32:04] **Denise Steilberger:** think sometimes we count the cost of quantity. we give breaks. so if you buy one, it's 11.

[00:32:10] If you buy two, it's 20. And we say, if you buy two, we'll give you a break. It's only 20. And then if you buy the next one, it's the regular price. And then if you buy the next one, we give you another break. So, you know, that kind of really helps them sometimes. We have people who will just come in and buy five and six containers of fudge.

[00:32:30] like I said, we have very loyal customers, they'll just call us and say, hey, I'm going to be at, at the mall store, or I'm going to be at your location, I'm going to be here, can you give me, bring me six containers of fudge? And they'll tell us what they want, so. we also offer delivery in our local area within a ten mile radius to our local people.

[00:32:49] we find that for the older people, that's really very helpful for seniors, because a lot of them can't get out, you know, and they'll, they'll want fudge, but they can't necessarily get to the farmer's market or to the festival to get it. we offer that service here in Ocala.

[00:33:04] **David Crabill:** Do you charge for delivery?

[00:33:06] **Denise Steilberger:** We do. We charge 5. We figure that's fine.

[00:33:10] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I saw that you recently just lowered your prices for Christmas. And I was really surprised by that because I'm thinking Christmas time is when fudge is in the Most demand. So, I was just curious why you made that decision to lower prices at what I assume is your peak season.

[00:33:29] **Denise Steilberger:** Yes, well, because it pays off for us, it paid off for us in quantity. at Christmas time we do a lot of shipping. We do more online business during Christmas than we do out at the markets. So we decided that because we have customers, you know, the shipping cost is pretty astronomical for people.

[00:33:49] So, we decided that for online we would, Lower the cost of the fudge. And then, we didn't think it was fair to not do that if it came to the market, because then you have adverse problems. So, we did that also. But because of that, they just bought more fudge.

[00:34:05] **Eric Steilberger:** Yeah, plus you get more new customers, you know.

[00:34:08] It's like, oh, it's only this much now. Oh, well, you know, because not everybody can afford, you know, 11 for a half pound of fudge. I understand that. So, it's like, oh, now it's only this much. Okay, you know, I'll buy some for myself and the family. So, we've definitely got a lot more new people you know, hopefully we'll see them as return customers.

[00:34:26] So we'll see how that works out for us.

[00:34:28] **Denise Steilberger:** it's funny you brought that up because we've had a couple of people say to us. Wow, everybody else is raising their prices during Christmas. You lowered yours. So, sometimes trend setting is okay. It's okay to be trendy.

[00:34:40] **David Crabill:** Now, while we're on the topic of pricing, I saw at least sometimes you sell just a slice of fudge for 3. Is that something that you still do?

[00:34:51] **Eric Steilberger:** We'll sell a quarter pound of fudge for five.

[00:34:56] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah, it could have been when we first started and we we had to figure out all of our cost of sales and everything. we now sell

the quarter pound for And we're pretty happy with that. We didn't used to do quarters at all.

[00:35:09] We, we didn't, we just did the half pounds, but well, I think it works twofold really. One, there are people that, they live by themselves. They can't consume an entire half a pound of fudge within a reasonable amount of time. So you're not going to get too big of a return customer from that.

[00:35:24] And then the second part is, is yes, sometimes. If, you know, you do it that way, they will return more and buy more, so. Plus

[00:35:33] **Eric Steilberger:** that way they can get two flavors, you know, for the price of basically one flavor. So, you know, they can try out two different

[00:35:38] **Denise Steilberger:** ones. Yeah, we didn't used to do samplers either, but now we do the sampler packs.

[00:35:43] it's challenging because, again, what do you do with the rest of it once you cut it up? So a sampler

[00:35:48] **Eric Steilberger:** pack is two different flavors in one container. So they're both quarter pound pieces. You know, cause people will come up to us and go, Oh, can I get a smaller one of this and a smaller one of that?

[00:35:57] No, unfortunately you can't because I'm not allowed to cut a piece of fudge here at the shop or in the market. so we started doing that, but you put a couple of flavors together, but not everybody wants those two particular flavors. So we started to do quarter pounds also.

[00:36:11] **Denise Steilberger:** And we also offer sugar free

[00:36:17] I make the sugar free, Eric makes the regular, so I use organic granulated stevia so it's not cut with anything else, and I use Hershey's zero chocolate chips. sugar free, zero free. So I just recently made started making a peanut butter that I can't, we can't even keep it in the, in the shop.

[00:36:41] it's an amazing thing. It doesn't, you know, there's so much to learn when you're making sugar free fudge about how much air to whip into it to make it creamy, you know, it was, that was a challenging thing also. However, I have to say the end result is great.

[00:36:56] **Eric Steilberger:** I will admit that her sugar free peanut butter tastes better than my regular peanut butter.

[00:37:00] Wow, really? Just don't, don't tell anybody

[00:37:03] **Denise Steilberger:** that.

[00:37:06] **David Crabill:** do ask about sugar free to me a lot. And I've always, I mean, I live in Sacramento. It's kind of a foodie hub. And I've always known if I came up with a sugar free recipe, it would sell like hotcakes, you know, but the fudge business for me is a very side thing during the holidays, so I, I just haven't taken the time to invest into it, but I just know there's so much demand for that, so.

[00:37:32] **Denise Steilberger:** Oh, yes. And you know, they're very particular about what they want it made with also. So, you know Stevia so much for joining me today and I hope to see in because there are other sweeteners before we would have people walk away, of course, because they're diabetic or, you know, they, they can't eat regular fudge. So we used to watch them walk away. And then one day we finally realized, you know what? We, we have to do something about that. we have to figure out how to make sugar free fudge and make it so that it's good.

[00:38:20] Because the first time we made it, I don't think it was that good.

[00:38:25] **Eric Steilberger:** We went through a lot of sugar free fudge, a lot of it went to the trash can, a lot of it went to the neighbors and stuff like that.

[00:38:30] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah. And that was another thing I wanted to say. When we first started the cottage food business, all of our neighbors in this neighborhood we live in, they were our guinea pigs.

[00:38:39] we would make, the fudge and we would take it and hand it out to them and ask them, what do you think? And we tell them we would want, we need honest answers. So, they would give us really good feedback. And that's how we kind of would get a feel for what was really maybe a popular flavor, what didn't taste so good, what was a greater combination.

[00:38:58] we use emulsions in our fudge. We don't like to use dyes, we're not going to say by any manner, shape, or form that fudge is healthy. However, we like to keep it to the barest minimum we can. we use Emulsions in it, and the

emulsions They're wonderful. When the chocolate heats up, they move through the chocolate wonderfully, and it just gives it such a distinct, beautiful flavor.

[00:39:19] So we're really sold on emulsions.

[00:39:22] **Eric Steilberger:** I made what I thought was a really good grape nut. Cereal fudge. Uh, But luckily I, you know, passed it around to the neighbors and they told me how awful it was. And bubblegum. So, and bubblegum. Yeah, there's a couple, I guess I'm a kid at heart so I like the weird flavors.

[00:39:37] So, you know, what I think tastes good. Probably it's just me and not, know, a heck of a lot of other people.

[00:39:42] **David Crabill:** I had noticed that there were some very unique flavors that I've never seen. In fudge before so like how do you come up with these flavors?

[00:39:51] **Denise Steilberger:** Well, I tell you, it's in my head. I don't know. Well,

[00:39:55] **Eric Steilberger:** my first job was at an ice cream store. So we made the ice cream there. So you know, I think we're both pretty good. She's probably even better than I am of what flavors go well with one another. Some everybody makes, but yeah, we do have a lot of unique flavors.

[00:40:09] **Denise Steilberger:** Purple haze or lavender. Yep,

[00:40:11] **Eric Steilberger:** lavender fudge. And you know, I would, if, you know, if she had asked me, Hey, why don't you make lavender fudge? And she probably asked me that a few times. And I go, I'm not making lavender fudge. But it is it's not the best seller by any means, but those people who like our lavender fudge, they are very loyal.

[00:40:28] You know, and they'll come and they'll buy a couple at a time. And there's, you know, there's quite a few people that will. guys buy it more than females. Yep, guys buy it uh, people from up north, I think, buy it maybe a little bit more because there's lavender fields up north. I don't think lavender really grows in Florida.

[00:40:43] but, try to come up with unusual flavors. She likes to come up with the unusual names. you know, there's a lot of flavors that, that I've done they're probably pretty good but just didn't really catch on. And a lot of times it's the

name, but unfortunately a lot of times it's because I tell her, no, no, we're not going to make it a weird name.

[00:40:59] Just, stick to what it is so people know. And, you know, it's my fault because it doesn't catch on as well. But, you know, sometimes we've made fudge and we've called it something. Didn't sell very well, but yet, you know, I said, okay, Denise, rename it and she'll rename it and then it picks off. You know, so a lot of times it isn't just

[00:41:15] **Denise Steilberger:** the name and presentation, we all know that presentation is important because people eat with their eyes long before they eat with their mouth.

[00:41:22] So, making it pretty, as pretty as you can in those containers that it's in, so that it's, visible and I think that's really between that and the sampling. We can't discredit the sampling. The sampling is, it's tedious, it's time consuming, but I've even seen sampling when I make cookies you know, because I make lavender cookies and I make lemon cookies.

[00:41:43] That's the only cookies I make in our shop and when we give out samples of even the cookies, people buy them like crazy. So, you know, sampling is very important.

[00:41:53] **David Crabill:** Well, we've got to talk about your product names because I you mentioned a couple Of them already, but you do use a lot of creativity and it's not just the name But there's like a whole theme around each flavor can you share a couple examples of that and, you know, what's behind that?

[00:42:12] **Eric Steilberger:** I'll bring up Skagway Shirley, which is our signature fudge. That's the one that I used to make with my mom. So my mom's name is Shirley. So that's where the Shirley part came over that. And then Skagway, that's the town that we lived at in Alaska. My mom would send us stuff to Alaska, you know, like she'd send us pecans or, I don't know what she'd send us, a whole bunch of, a whole bunch of stuff, you know, try to helping us out.

[00:42:36] So I thought that that would be a good name for that fudge. So that one stuck. And then I'll let Denise talk about all the other ones.

[00:42:42] **Denise Steilberger:** Well, I'm a music lover and I play guitar and I, I like music. I was in my boyfriend's band when I was young and, to me, like, if

you're going to make a lavender fudge and it's going to be a lavender color, I don't know, in my mind, I see purple haze, so, you know, I know this sounds a little weird, but I try to actually think what that fudge reminds me of before we give it a name.

[00:43:06] So, you know, like, Dark Desert Highway, Yeah, you could just say I've got a chocolate, dark chocolate walnut fudge. That would be okay. But, dark desert highway, we'll have people come up to the table and they'll go, ooh, dark desert highway, and they'll start singing the song, on a dark desert highway, and then, you know, they'll taste the fudge, and then of course they'll, they'll want to buy the fudge.

[00:43:29] So, I think it's just really um, Smooth Operator, you know, reminds me of jazz. You know, so I think it's really just very relatable. You can make it relatable to people again. It's making that connection, not only with what we say and how we personally relate to people, but letting our product make the connection also.

[00:43:49] **David Crabill:** you said that some of your products don't have these unique names or themes around them.

[00:43:55] **Denise Steilberger:** You know, that's Eric's fault. So

[00:43:58] **Eric Steilberger:** that's probably my fault.

[00:43:59] **David Crabill:** And do those not sell as well? Or do you see any difference?

[00:44:04] **Eric Steilberger:** Um, No, I, what's, uh, York Peppermint Patty just has, you know, what it is. That sells well. I'm drawing a blank

[00:44:10] **Denise Steilberger:** with flavors we have. I don't really know if well, I, I think sometimes, yes, if it's just a plain name, like everybody has butter pecan. we'll choose that. So there's a butter pecan ice cream.

[00:44:20] We know, we know everybody's got butter pecan everything, butter pecan cookies, but Southern charm butter pecan sounds so much more fitting here in the South, than just to say butter pecan. And so when the people order it from us, they'll say, I would like a half a pound of. Southern charm. See, they, again, you train them to know what, what your product is.

[00:44:42] I

[00:44:42] **Eric Steilberger:** think they get, you know, the guests get a kick out of it just as much as we do. You know, they like they'll say Southern charm instead of saying butter pecan, even though butter pecan's on the package. You know, they know it's butter pecan, but they'd rather say Southern charm. and just like in Alaska, we had, you know, stuff named Alaskan themed, like she said before.

[00:44:59] And I think people got a kick out of that,

[00:45:02] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah, we had a bear scat soup and, bear scat soup was interesting. It had cranberries in it. And it was, you know, a very beef based soup. So, they would always order the bear scat soup. And so, they get kind of a kick out of it because, you know, they think they're really indulging in something that's really just basic.

[00:45:23] And it's not like it's trickery, actually very good marketing.

[00:45:28] **David Crabill:** Well, I know in 2022, you had plans to buy an ice cream truck Walk me through that, what happened?

[00:45:37] **Eric Steilberger:** as I said before, my first job was at an ice cream store. I worked there for seven years. I started working there when I, I think I was 14. I've always thought about owning an ice cream store, and then, you know, food trucks are the rage now, and to me it just seems, oh, you know, why stick in an ice cream store where, you know, people have to come to you?

[00:45:56] I'd rather have a truck and go to where the people are, which I guess is what everybody thinks, you know, it's a food truck. yeah, I don't know if I would eventually like get one still maybe, maybe not, I don't know. but yeah, you know, even a fudge truck, if I could find a little concession trailer or something.

[00:46:11] **Denise Steilberger:** Or incorporate our fudge into the ice cream, which would have been nice. Or, yep,

[00:46:14] **Eric Steilberger:** incorporate our fudge into the ice cream. you know, always interested in ice cream or fudge. And fudge is probably what I knew better because it's been a long time since I've made ice cream.

[00:46:24] And even though I think Fudge takes longer to make, for sure. you know, the complexities of ice cream might be a little bit harder than fudge.

[00:46:32] **David Crabill:** Well, maybe you didn't buy a food truck, but I see last year, in 2023, you did. Essentially move into your own space. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:46:44] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah, we moved into a mall space, so there was an old Kmart building that had been sitting for a long time I think about 15 years, empty. And so um, these people they purchased it and they wanted to turn it into an artisan's mall. they were offering spaces. So we, you know, you design your own space.

[00:47:04] It's your space. You set it up, you do what you want with it. So we thought that would be a great opportunity. Because in our summer months, we would be able to be inside in the air conditioning, you know, and we wouldn't have to be concerned about what to do with our fudge. So and we still could do our outside markets other days of the week.

[00:47:20] we did that for, was it nine months? Yep. We gained new customers. We also met some really great people while we were there. You know, it's an opportunity.

[00:47:32] I think that, you know, when an opportunity arises If you have something that you think, will work, you should try. I mean, if you can try, you should try it. I find that very adventurous, you know.

[00:47:43] I think that when we sit back and we do nothing, and then we just hope that we did something, then, everything usually just becomes mundane for us. And with fudge, we know the fudge is going to make it. It's already made it for, what's it been, three years now? Yep.

[00:47:57] Three years. Going on three years, so. We like challenges. Yeah, we do. We like challenges. And, cottage food is definitely challenging, but it's worth it.

[00:48:06] **David Crabill:** So you have done a lot of local markets over the last three years. Last year, you did a lot of selling out of this vendor space So what are we looking at for 2024 and into the future?

[00:48:20] **Eric Steilberger:** I think we're entertaining the thought of wholesaling. So that we can get our product out to different places on a more constant basis. And I don't think we'll ever get into a retail store, especially not with fudge, you know, cause we don't live on the beach or on an Island in Michigan.

[00:48:35] So I don't know if fudge would do well on its own. we've looked at, retail ice cream stores and. We just haven't pulled the trigger on that, and I don't know if we ever will or not, but maybe an ice cream fudge truck, and maybe not, maybe we'll just stick to wholesale fudge or maybe just keep on going with the cottage food.

[00:48:52] Uh, Lots of people uh, you know, in their 60s and 70s and 80s we see out there uh, whether they're doing cottage food or just doing something else at the farmers markets. So, it's uh, work one day a week and uh, make enough money on that one day to, keep going. Sounds uh, pretty good to me in a, in a few years.

[00:49:10] **Denise Steilberger:** Yeah, I think our business plan is, make enough money to be able to, of course, support. Our products, but also to allow us to pay ourselves. So, we have really been quite successful at it and we're very thankful.

[00:49:24] **Eric Steilberger:** I think we're very blessed to be in the position that we are and to be doing as well as we are.

[00:49:30] I think if you would have asked me a few years ago, had we, you know, do I really think we could have done this well? I would have said, eh, you know, maybe in the winter months we might have done this well but I certainly wouldn't have thought that, you know, in the summer months that we could still keep it going. So that is a little surprising.

[00:49:47] **Denise Steilberger:** again, you know, we've had people ask us about putting our fudge in their shops. And I think Eric is more on board with that right now than I am, so, you know, that would be something that we'll have to really look at more closely in the future, I'm kind of not too quick to dive into things, so to say.

[00:50:05] I'm adventurous, but not, quick to jump. not reckless.

[00:50:08] **David Crabill:** Well, as you think about what you've learned over, I guess, a very long time of food service experience being involved in restaurants, running a cafe, running a cottage food business, what are some of Things that you would tell someone who's starting out on this journey and doesn't have the kind of experience that you do.

[00:50:29] **Eric Steilberger:** Well first I would say uh, do it. I was talking to Denise about this the other day, you know people get stressed out about

something too much and they'll go, Oh, well, what are we going to name ourselves? what's going to be the name of the company? Well, just get out there and start making something, you know, and just put up their homemade cookies or homemade fudge.

[00:50:47] You can figure out the name later. You know, I don't think uh, we don't sell fudge because people, know, because of our name, we sell fudge because of the quality of our product. we don't even have to have the word fudge to fuse in our, anywhere in our building or anywhere in our tent or in the farmer's market or anything.

[00:51:03] Just say homemade fudge. People will come find you. They'll try it and. And if it's good, they're going to buy it from you. that's one thing. And I would say uh, take your ServSafe tests, learn, learn what you're doing constantly be cleaning stuff and constantly uh, have a presentable table and.

[00:51:18] look presentable while you're there and use uh, resources like, uh, your website and uh, CastIron learn from those who have the ability to teach you you know, look on Facebook pages and get examples and, learn from those who are doing it.

[00:51:33] **David Crabill:** you know, as you think back on your business journey, are there any stories that stand out to you or any really memorable moments that we haven't covered already?

[00:51:43] **Denise Steilberger:** This one was very memorable. was a downtown market and this little family came up to us. And this little girl, she pointed at the, I think it was the strawberry at the time, she liked pink, so she wanted the strawberry fudge. And so at first her mom was like, oh, I don't know. That's a lot of sugar. But then like little girls do.

[00:52:04] She kept bugging her mom about it and so her mom said, okay, so the little girl picked up the package of strawberry fudge and she said, can I sing you a song? Remember that? And she started singing, you are my sunshine, my only sunshine. It was so cute and she's holding the fudge all up to her chest.

[00:52:23] So, you know, what such joy that brings you. I mean, how sweet that. a package of fudge would give a little girl such joy.

[00:52:31] **David Crabill:** So why are you so passionate about this business? What keeps you going?

[00:52:37] **Eric Steilberger:** know, it sounds, maybe it sounds a little corny, but I, I, you know, I get a kick out of people. Trusting us and enjoying what we make. you know, ever since I was seven or eight, I wanted to, I wanted to own my own food business and I can remember that distinctly. You know, so besides being a baseball player, I wanted to own my own restaurant basically.

[00:52:55] So, to me, the fudge business, this is my own restaurant now. So I take great pride in uh, in that.

[00:53:02] **Denise Steilberger:** when we started, I'm not going to say I had a passion for fudge, but I certainly had a passion to be able to do something with Eric that we could do together and, kind of do it on our terms.

[00:53:13] So I think you need to be passionate about what you're doing, whatever that's going to be. And, you know, that passion is what carries through to your customers. When they see that passion in you, then they know that you really back your product, that you care about your product and you care about them.

[00:53:30] And you know, we, we like, we enjoy talking with our customers. That's one thing we love about being out in the market. is we actually get to enjoy meeting people, talking with people, building that connection with them even if it's only for five, five minutes or so.

[00:53:45] **Eric Steilberger:** And I think one of the best things for Denise is, Denise is a chaplain and there will be, I don't know how it happens, but there's just tons of people that just see something in her.

[00:53:55] And we'll come up to her and ask her to pray for them or talk to Denise about issues and problems. No one's ever done that to me uh, but they, they seem to find Denise out and, and talk to her about those things. And I think that's one of the things that Denise really likes about.

[00:54:12] Us being out and selling fudge is that it's almost like Our ministry. is that Denise gets to, pray with people and that's something that's very important to us and especially for her. And I think she finds a lot of joy in giving uh, joy, to other people.

[00:54:27] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you Eric and Denise for sharing all of that. Now, If somebody wants to learn more about your story, where can they find you, or how can they reach out?

[00:54:39] **Denise Steilberger:** our story is posted on the Castiron website that we have our fudge shop is.

[00:54:44] They also can find us on Google, if they Google us, and Facebook, and Instagram.

[00:54:51] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:54:55] **Denise Steilberger:** Well, thank you. We really appreciated it,

[00:55:01] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

[00:55:04] For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/106.

[00:55:11] And if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long review, but it's truly the best way to support this show and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:55:22] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

[00:55:33] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.