

The Palm Beach Post

Sunday, February 4, 2007

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SUNDAY,
FEBRUARY 4, 2007
PalmBeachPost.com

BUSINESS

With tonight's Super Bowl in nearby Miami Gardens, several lucky Palm Beach County businesses have the chance to showcase their products.

NFL program brings

SUPER GIGS



By LORI BECKER
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Christine Najac is at Dolphin Stadium today taking her "one-bowl wonder" to the biggest bowl of them all.

It's her national debut, a chance for the Boca Raton baker to titillate the taste buds of the NFL elite and 30,000 of their closest friends with her gourmet treats.

The owner of Really Good Cookies, Najac will be serving up her Florida Snoballs — a mix of coconut, cranberries and walnuts in Key lime-flavored white chocolate — at the football giant's exclusive tailgate party.

She has been baking for nearly two weeks, it's a fairly simple recipe, but she needs 2,000 of the Snoballs for the pre-game soiree. She handled a few other orders of this size, but not this notoriety.

SUPER BOWL

■ A look at other local businesses invited to the big game, SC

"That exposure alone is just remarkable," said Najac, 42. "It can be intimidating. You've got to produce, because if you fall the whole world's going to know about it."

Really Good Cookies is one of the caterers chosen to cook for the NFL's invitation-only party before Super Bowl XLII tonight. The event is expected to draw 10,000 VIP guests, from celebrities and corporate executives to athletes and government leaders.

For Najac, who has a background in hospitality, catering and marketing, it is an opportunity she knew she couldn't pass up. Already advertising her Super Bowl connection on her Web site, Najac is hoping it will be the ticket to bigger things for her 2-year-old cookie business.

"What will happen after? I don't know. But the credibility that it's giving me is once-in-a-lifetime," she said. "You hope they remember you. You'll remember if the president of Pepsi comes to your booth, but will she remember you?"

NFL officials predict the Super Bowl's week-long hoopla and matchup tonight between the Chicago Bears and the Indianapolis Colts will draw 125,000 visitors and generate more than \$350 million for South Florida.

See NFL, 56 ▶

BLIZZARD OF COOKIES: Christine Najac, owner of Really Good Cookies in Boca Raton, will stir up 2,000 of her Florida Snoballs for the pre-game Super Bowl party, giving her exposure to thousands of VIP guests.

FAMILY TRADITION: Derrick McCray (front right), owner of McCray's Backyard BBQ in Mangonia Park, will offer ribs and brisket. With him (from left) are brothers Demetrius and Herman III, cousin Walter Macrow and dad Herman Jr.

BYRON D. JAMES
Staff Photographer



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Businesses eager for national stage

► NFL from 1F

Najac's company is among a couple hundred of the region's small firms getting in the game.

Small shops, big chance

Many of these businesses got gigs through the NFL's Emerging Business Program, an effort to give minority- and woman-owned small businesses in the annual contest's host community a chance to get involved.

This year, the program was open to small businesses in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. Firms had to be certified through a local agency, such as a county or city government, to apply for the program.

Derrick McCray is among them.

The Mangonia Park restaurant owner headed to the big game with four super-sized grills, a giant smoker, 21 crew members and more than 5,000 pounds of pork ribs and beef brisket.

He'll be joining Najac at the VIP tailgate event today, treating partygoers to his lip-smacking baby-back ribs and signature sauces. His crew started grilling Wednesday to prepare.

It's McCray's biggest job yet, putting his family's decades-long barbecue tradition on a national stage. His McCray's II Backyard BBQ has catered large events and local festivals but nothing on the Super Bowl scale.

"We're ready. We want to make a good showing to the world," McCray, 44, said two weeks ago as folks lined up outside his roadside stand on busy 45th Street, the sweet, smoky smell of barbecue wafting from the grills. "I'm very humbled by it. This takes us to another level."

About 425 businesses were accepted into the Emerging Business Program, landing them in the *Business Resource Guide*, a list of approved vendors sent to the NFL and affiliated groups looking for everything from printing to catering, tents to flowers. It also gained them access to training workshops and networking sessions.

As of Dec. 15, about 155 of these businesses (37 percent) had gotten work, said Gary Hartfield, director of community outreach for the South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee. He expects that number has grown, but he will not have an updated count until after the game.

But Palm Beach County firms didn't get much of the action.

"We paid as much attention to Palm Beach as we paid to Broward and Dade," Hartfield said, pointing to workshops held in all three counties to promote the program. "But we didn't draw as big a crowd."

About 90 firms on the tri-county resource list (41 percent) are from Palm Beach County. Of those, at least



CHRIS MATULA/Staff Photographer

'What will happen after? I don't know,' Christine Najac says of serving her Florida Snoballs at the Super Bowl. 'But the credibility that it's giving me is once-in-a-lifetime.'

Game plan for businesses

At least seven Palm Beach County businesses are involved in Super Bowl XLI and its surrounding activities after winning bids to work with the NFL or its affiliates:

Really Good Cookies

Owner: Christine Najac
Location: Boca Raton
Contract: Baking 2,000 Florida Snoballs for the NFL tailgate party

Boynnton Billiards

Owner: Deborah Corvey
Location: Boynton Beach
Contract: Providing eight pool tables for the NFL's invitation-only tailgate party

Celsius Holdings Corp.

Owner: Regina Lewis
Location: Jupiter
Contract: Produced a series of seven small business training workshops for NFL's Community Impact Program

Chez Gourmet

Owner: Sheri and Jack Jacobs
Location: Boynton Beach
Contract: Making 2,000 orders of banana-, Key lime- and mango-flavored crème brûlée for the NFL tailgate party

Direct Business Systems

Owner: Bertram Pender
Location: West Palm Beach
Contract: Made 10,000 lapel pins for the NFL's Emerging Business Program

Everglades Trading & Office Supply

Owner: Kathy Cross
Location: Belle Glade
Contract: Sold paper, pens and other office supplies to the South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee

McCray's II Backyard BBQ

Owner: Derrick McCray
Location: Mangonia Park
Contract: Cooking ribs and beef brisket for the NFL's tailgate party

Source: South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee

seven have won contracts for work.

The NFL started the Emerging Business Program in 1994 to give small businesses a greater chance to benefit when the big game comes to their communities.

Since then, an average of \$4 million has been spent with small firms each year, NFL officials said.

Over the past decade, the NFL has worked harder to

"strongly encourage" its contractors to hire vendors from the program, Hartfield said.

In 1995 and 1999 — the two Super Bowls hosted by South Florida since the small business program started — about 15 percent of firms in the program got work. That's likely to triple this year.

"Regular NFL contractors are now used to this program and trust the host committee to get enough vendors in the

The NFL has spent on average \$4 million a year since '94 with small businesses.

resource guide to get quality services," Hartfield said.

Some area businesses got work long before the big day.

Bertram Pender, owner of Direct Business Systems, a distributor of business forms and promotional products in West Palm Beach, made 10,000 lapel pins with the Emerging Business Program logo last summer.

"They were handed out to participating businesses at kickoff events."

Pender, 55, bid on several more contracts, however, with no success.

"It's very competitive. ... The prices just weren't there for me to get the business," he said.

NFL officials caution firms that acceptance in the small business program doesn't guarantee a contract. But they encourage them to go for the opportunity.

"Some of these businesses are bidding at cost for the jobs just to put it on their résumé," said Donn Patchen, spokesman for the host committee. "It's better advertising than the sales made."

More than just tailgating

Some small firms also get contracts outside of the Emerging Business Program.

Regina Lewis, president of Celsius Holdings Corp. in Jupiter, got such a request.

The NFL asked her public relations firm to submit a proposal to produce a series of business workshops. It got the job.

As part of the football league's Community Impact Program, Celsius planned seven workshops for small businesses across the tri-county region over the past two months. Topics ranged from getting financing to managing staff.

"It just seemed like a unique project, similar to work we were already doing," said Lewis, 48. "This gives us a broader platform beyond Palm Beach County and extends our relationships."

That's the aim for Derrick McCray. Whether he's back at another Super Bowl or not, McCray is hoping people around the country will return for a taste of his ribs.

His father, Herman McCray Jr., 65, started the original McCray's barbecue restaurant in Riviera Beach in the 1970s.

He said he's proud of his son's Super Bowl splash but reminds him that it's just another customer.

"There are no big-name clients," he said. "They're just people. They all eat. If the product wasn't any good, then they wouldn't be here."

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