

# Ola! Granola sets up shop

NORWALK

By CHRIS BOSAK

Hour Staff Writer

Dina Houser has involved her children from the beginning in the process of growing her granola company.

Even the name of the company, Ola Granola, was inspired by her children.

"The kids love rhyming and they called out a bunch of words that ended in 'ola.' Finally, Ola just stuck," Houser, who has three boys, recalled. "It's universal. It says hello."

Houser, who lives in Redding, recently relocated her business from Westport to a commercial kitchen on Woodward Avenue in Norwalk. Ola Granola specializes in natural granola products in various flavors such as vanilla almond, cranberry orange, and pecan. Houser hopes to expand her product line beyond granola in the near future.

"It's a family-friendly food," Houser said. "Kids tend to shy away from healthy foods. Our granola is attractive to kids without being juvenile. Once they try it, they love it. It's a healthy and sustaining snack. It's not just for breakfast anymore, it's for anytime and anywhere."

Her products are found in local specialty shops such as Whole Foods, Stew Leonard's, SoNo Station Cafe, Ancona's Market, Palmer's Market, and Village Market in Wilton. They can also be purchased online via the company's website.

"These are stores that are a good fit, with good, healthy food," Houser said. "We have great product and local stores have been very supportive of our brand. It's a process and we've worked hard to create the brand."

She said the move to Norwalk is the "next step in the process." Houser had been sharing a commercial kitchen in Westport, but her company grew to the point where she needed a place with no scheduling restrictions.

"We were looking for a larger space and this seemed like a good temporary

solution, until we can properly find and build out a place to our specifications," she said. "Norwalk has been extremely welcoming and helpful, so (our next space) could very well be in Norwalk, too."

David Genovese is a partner with Baywater Properties, which owns and manages the building where Ola Granola relocated.

"Dina Houser has big plans for her granola and food company and she choose Norwalk as the place to help make those dreams come true," Genovese said. "Ola Granola has set up shop in a commercial kitchen on Woodward Avenue. It's the next step. The location allows for expansion and that was particularly appealing to Dina."

Genovese said Baywater Properties also owns other buildings in South Norwalk that would allow for further expansion.

Tad Diesel, Norwalk's director of marketing and business development, said Ola Granola may be the next great granola company to put down roots in Norwalk. Diesel previously helped bring granola company Bear Naked to Norwalk. That company has since been bought out by Kashi and moved out of Norwalk.

"It cements Norwalk's reputation as the planting ground for the great granola companies of the world," said Diesel. "I have no doubt that Ola Granola will be a welcomed member of that group."

Houser said a turning point for her company was getting into Stew Leonard's. Bear Naked also pointed to Stew Leonard's as a springboard for its success.

While Houser would like to emulate the success of Bear Naked, she stopped short of making any comparisons.

"We're quite different," she said. "Our flavor is unique."

Houser said pure maple syrup is the only sweetener used in her granola. She has been making the granola for years for her children, now aged 10, 9, and 5.

"For them to be involved from the beginning has been an extraordinary experience," she said.