

Downstairs deli expands scope of chocolate shop

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Inexpensive deli sandwiches and expensive chocolates are co-existing under one roof.

At Noah's Down Under Birmingham Chocolatier (that's right, that's the whole name), downstairs at 149 Pierce, boxes of hand-dipped chocolates share the space with a sit-down deli sandwich shop.

"It's really two separate businesses under one roof," acknowledged owner Ruth Stromer of West Bloomfield. She started selling chocolates almost two years ago, as a franchise for Kron Chocolates.

When she pulled out of the franchise, Ms. Stromer changed the name to Birmingham Chocolatier. When she decided to add a sandwich operation, she named that after her 4-year-old son Noah.

The small, charming shop has an all-white, contemporary decor, with bright green carpeting. Counters and stools along one side are where the deli customers sit.

ONE OF THE most popular menu items is the Miss Piggy Sandwich (\$3.95). Unbelievably, this is a concoction that has "two slices of every meat in the store — 16 counting cheese. And they order them with Diet Pepsi," Ms. Stromer said, with a laugh.

Formerly a high school English teacher, Ms. Stromer had become fascinated with Kron Chocolates, so her husband, a foot doctor, "bought a franchise for me," she said.

"I learned all about chocolates, how to make and hand dip them."

Now that she's added a deli, she has to arrange her schedule to work on the chocolates in the morning, before the lunch crowd arrives for sandwiches.

"It's dry and cool in the mornings and I can start working with the chocolate," she said.

Noah's Down Under Birmingham Chocolatier is an all-women operation. Ms. Stromer said, "I had a couple of

men working here, but it just didn't work out." The shop is managed by Angela Riccardi Whitmore, an ex-nurse.

ANOTHER DELI favorite at Noah's is the Greek Salad in Pocket of Pita (\$1.99). Pita bread also is used for individual pizzas with cheese, mushrooms and salami (\$1.75).

"Everything is fresh. The manager does all the cooking," Ms. Stromer said.

There are homemade soups daily, chosen from Italian vegetable, beef barley, chicken noodle, cream of mushroom and clam chowder. "They vary daily, two soups and a chili," she said.

Noah's is known for kosher jumbo hot dogs, too, the proprietor said.

The shop is open 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday-Wednesday and Saturday. Sandwiches are served till 4 p.m. daily, except Thursday-Friday when sandwiches may be ordered till 6 p.m. (chocolates are on sale until 7 p.m. both days).

Noah's has tried serving breakfast but that didn't seem to catch on. Lunch business is biggest, naturally, and an early dinner crowd arrives Thursday-Friday around 4:30 p.m.

NOAH'S ENCOURAGES customers-in-a-hurry to call ahead, and their sandwich will be waiting when they get there. The deli offers free delivery Mondays-Fridays. The shop also does deli trays and chocolate trays for parties.

Hand-dipped chocolates in wooden boxes range in price from \$5 for a half-pound to \$20 for a one-pound assortment and \$50 for three pounds.

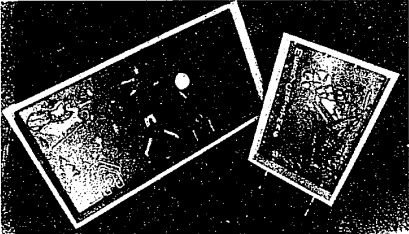
"We specialize in fruits dipped in chocolate, fresh cream truffles, and giant chocolate chip cookies," Ms. Stromer said.

These ready desserts sit temptingly on the countertop outside the kitchen area, and many deli customers order them to finish off a big sandwich feast.



Ruth Stromer is the proprietor of Noah's Down Under Birmingham Chocolatier, a chocolate shop that now offers deli specials, too. (Staff photos by Dick Kelley)

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