

# Sweet Dream

**Jessica dePontbriand '03 started with a Holloway business prize and ended up with a Greek bakery**

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**In March 2014**, Jessica dePontbriand '03 opened a coffee and pastry shop in Nashua, N.H. The idea had been rolling around in her head for more than 10 years. People often say that when they finally make this kind of leap: “I’ve been thinking about doing this forever.” But dePontbriand has proof.

Hanging on the wall in jajaBelle’s Pastry and Coffee Shop on Main Street is the sketch of a storefront, complete with the name “jajaBelle’s” written on the awning, that dePontbriand had included with her 2003 entry in UNH’s Holloway Business Plan Competition. Her idea for a café offering Greek pastries, ice cream and coffee won her first place, and \$4,000, in the lifestyles category.

The idea first breathed life as a project for an entrepreneurial class dePontbriand was taking. Students with the best presentations were encouraged to enter the competition, held annually since 1988.

“Everything since then has brought me to this moment; I have come full circle to what my dream was on paper 11 years ago,” dePontbriand says.

After graduating UNH with a degree in hospitality, dePontbriand began selling Greek pastries at craft fairs in New Hampshire, using recipes handed down in her family for generations.

That very first fair was a financial bust; dePontbriand made far too much food, it was beastly hot, and she had only four customers. But those four raved about her pastries. dePontbriand moved to Colorado in 2006 and started selling baklava (phyllo dough and walnuts covered in a homemade syrup), finikia (date filled cookies, dipped in syrup, rolled in walnuts) and spanakopita (spinach and feta wrapped in phyllo) at farmer’s markets between Denver and Vail.

“There were a lot of late, late nights, sometimes no-sleep nights, spent baking, getting everything together and then driving from one place to the next,” dePontbriand says. “It was a lot of good hard work.”

During a 2013 visit home, dePontbriand happened by the Main Street storefront where her coffee shop is now located and saw that it was for rent. She called the landlord immediately. And within months, the plan she’d devised more than a decade earlier was coming to fruition.

In a nod to that long road, dePontbriand included a picture of the original jajaBelle’s sketch on invitations to the ribbon-cutting ceremony for her store last year.

jajaBelle’s (Jaja was her childhood nickname) is full of items dePontbriand had been collecting throughout the years, an eclectic mix that gives the coffee shop a warm, welcoming vibe. Since opening she has expanded her menu, adding brownies, lace cookies and French macarons, muffins and quick breads. She also has a robust mail-order business. During the holidays, with the help of two employees, she mailed boxes of her cookies to 18 states.

And she still keeps in touch with her Colorado customers. Since opening her Nashua shop, six of them have visited the store during travels to New England. dePontbriand also has gone back to Colorado to again sell her goods at the farmer’s markets.

“The Holloway Competition validated the idea of jajaBelle’s and now it’s a reality,” she says. “A few weeks ago a woman who had been in the Holloway Competition the year after me came in and said, ‘Look at you, you did it.’ And I said, ‘Yes, I finally did.’”

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