

# Sweet Spots For All Things Chocolate

by Sandra Chambers

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**Want to visit a grown-up version of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory?** You won't even need a golden ticket. Simply gather a group of 10 to 16 friends and head downtown to a little pink house on Orange Street for light hors d'oeuvres, champagne, a tour of the kitchen and a bit of chocolate history. Then don a head scarf and dig those hands into homemade dough, roll it into bite-sized balls and learn the perfect dipping technique as you plunge the dough into a pool of dark chocolate, creating the most exquisite chocolate bonbons this side of France.

"It's a dying art to make a hand-dipped chocolate bonbon," insists Charlene Dupray, who is the southern part of the **South 'n France** confectionary business she and her French husband Pascal Siegler opened in 2006

"In France, bonbon is the universal word for candy," Siegler explains. "It literally means 'goody, goody.' But from a French culinary perspective, the bonbon is defined as a sweet dough or confection that has been dipped in an outer layer of chocolate."

Last October, South 'n France took its bonbons to the Philadelphia National Candy, Gift, and Gourmet Show where it won Best in Show (chocolate category) in the New Products Round-Up.

While South 'n France has put Wilmington on the map for bonbons, **The Little Dipper** has

## The Skinny on Chocolate

- The fruit of the Cacao tree grows directly from the trunk and looks like small melons, and the pulp inside contains 20-50 seeds or beans.
- It takes about 400 beans to make a pound of chocolate.
- Chocolate is America's favorite flavor. In a survey 52 percent of U.S. adults say they like chocolate best.
- Seventy-one percent of American chocolate eaters prefer milk chocolate.
- Dark chocolate possesses the highest antioxidant content of any food—more than green or black tea, red wine and blueberries.
- Chocolate contributes less than two percent of the fat in the American diet.
- Chocolate contains very little caffeine—50 M&Ms have about as much caffeine as a cup of decaffeinated coffee.

*Compiled from [www.squidoo.com/chocolate](http://www.squidoo.com/chocolate) and used by permission.*

made its mark with its award-winning chocolate fondue. Voted Grand Champion at last year's Chocolate Fantasy Adventure, The Little Dipper's chocolate fondue comes in five different, delectable blends of chocolate sauce with dippers such as cream puffs, marshmallows, pretzels, strawberries, bananas and pineapple.

"We opened on Front Street in July 2005," says Kristen Gruodis, one of the restaurant's seven owners. "Fondue has always been a family tradition during the holidays — it's a very social activity and a very romantic one, also. Many people come in just for the chocolate fondue dessert, which can be served in the main restaurant, the bar, or on the back deck."

With more than 1,800 square feet of chocolate, **Just Because Chocolates** has been offering some of the best handmade treats since 1997. "I was born on Valentine's Day, and I was destined to make chocolate," says owner Milli Walton, alias Milli Wonka. "People started calling me Milli Wonka, and it has stuck. In fact, I have a license plate that says, 'Ms. Wonka.'"

About 10 years ago, Walton started making candy with her grandmother in Salisbury. "Out of granny's kitchen came Just Because Chocolates, along with some of the best chocolates, pecan brittle, turtles and chocolate-covered pretzels," Walton says.

Visitors can come into the store, located on Fountain Drive, year round to create their own made-to-order gift packages, Walton points out. But Valentine's is one of the busiest seasons.

“Just before Valentine’s Day, we have a line of people out the door just waiting to create their own special Valentine baskets,” she says.

Just Because Chocolates also offers children’s birthday parties and adult chocolate fondue parties for up to 15 people. “It’s all you can eat,” says Walton. “We give you a bowl of chocolate with strawberries, apricots, brandy-soaked cherries, marshmallows, bananas, pretzels and potato chips for dipping.”

“My grandmother used to tell me, ‘I make them [chocolates] for you...‘just because.’ Now after her passing, God has given her gift to me, and she, in turn, would want me to make them for you...‘just because.’”

### **Looking for chocolate...in all the right places**

With Valentine’s Day just around the corner, most gift-givers know that chocolate ranks right up there with roses as the most romantic gift one can give. Most do not know that this traditional gift of love, which bears the botanical name of Theobroma cacao, means “Food of the Gods.” According to legend, the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl descended from heaven on a beam of the morning star carrying a cacao tree stolen from paradise. The Aztecs believed that wisdom and power came from eating the fruit of the cocoa tree, and that it had aphrodisiac qualities.

Throughout the centuries, various countries and cultures have improved the taste of the original “bitter water,” as it was called in Mayan culture, making it smooth and delectable for chocoholics worldwide.

Several local chocolate dealers shared with us their most popular chocolate item for Valentine’s Day. With so many possibilities, purchasing just the right chocolate for your special Valentine should be a breeze.

#### **Candy Store at Hummingbird Station**

339 North Front Street, (Cotton Exchange)  
762-3727

Double chocolate truffles

\$1.99-2.15 per truffle

#### **Carolina Candy Company**

2323 S. 17th Street

794-9905

Tarheel Toffee covered in milk chocolate

\$14.99 lb.

#### **Edible Arrangements**

The Galleria, 6766 Wrightsville Ave.

256-3130

Valentine Berry Chocolate Bouquet

(Pineapple, melon and gourmet chocolate strawberries)

\$65-\$200

#### **Just Because Chocolates**

4549 Fountain Dr., behind McAllister’s

452-2212

Create your own Valentine basket with homemade chocolates, dark and milk chocolate,

\$25 and up.

#### **Kilwins Chocolate & Ice Cream**

16 Market Street

772-1298

Chocolate-covered strawberries

\$17.95 lb.

#### **The Little Dipper**

138 S. Front Street

251-0433

Chocolate Fondue

\$10 for 2 people; \$14 for 4 people

#### **Lindt Chocolate Shop**

3500 Oleander Dr., (Independence Mall)

796-0333

Heart-shaped truffles in special heart-shaped box  
\$30-\$60

**NOFO**

1125 Military Cutoff Road  
256-0467

Moonstruck 10-piece heart collection of chocolate truffles  
\$29.95

**South 'n France**

762-6882

Bucket o' Love—ribbon-laced pink bucket with choice of bonbons  
\$15-\$30

**Temptations Gourmet Foods & Café**

3501 Oleander Drive  
763-6662

Lake Champlain Chocolate Truffles  
\$1.90 per truffle

**Toffee Talk**

Sold at Pine Valley Markets

3520 South College &  
114 Dock Street

350-3663/ 251-7890

Homemade toffee with semi-sweet chocolate and almonds  
\$8 ½ lb.

— *Sandra Chambers*