

## Lil Red's Popcorn Emporium

A huge smile breaks out on owner Theresa Brine's face as she recalls the inspiration behind the name of her business. "Lil Red" was the affectionate nickname given to her by her sons once they surpassed her in height. But don't let the name fool you; while Theresa herself may be a petite redhead, her popcorn boasts BIG flavor!

Theresa began making popcorn in 2013 for local farm markets, as well as the nursing staff at the Mom and Baby Ward at Mercy Health - St. Elizabeth Boardman Hospital and the Emergency Department at Akron Children's Hospital Mahoning Valley. Soon thereafter, she received orders for her popcorn. Then, Dan Catullo, of Catullo's Prime Meats in Youngstown, suggested she talk to the Common Wealth Kitchen Incubator (CWKI) about commercial production. She admits that uncertainty caused her to wait a year before having the conversation. However, when she visited the CWKI, she was met with a supportive staff ready to assist her with a business plan and to introduce her to Kate Gainard Monroe of A Dying Art Company in Girard for labels. Thus, Lil Red's Popcorn Emporium was born!

Over the last two years, Theresa has built a successful small business that focuses on making a quality product. She makes her 14 regular flavors and seasonal flavors by hand and in custom batches, so it arrives fresh to her customers. She also makes her own caramel sauce and the majority of her seasonings. She incorporates local beer cheese from Country Cupboard for the "Happy Hour Cheddah" flavor.

The attention she pays to her craft has increased her sales footprint in the Mahoning Valley, as she currently sells her popcorn in the Cultivate Café, Catullo's Prime Meats, Casual Pint, Modern Methods Brewing Company, Sweet Melissa's, and Molnar Farms (during the summer and fall markets). She visits businesses in person and offers free samples to market her product. Most locations that carry her popcorn order 24 bags every two-three weeks, keeping her busy in the CWKI almost every other week, where she enjoys the fun working atmosphere and convenience of producing, bagging, and labeling her product all in one location. She encourages anyone interested in operating a food-related small business to talk to Sean Dougherty, the CWKI Kitchen Manager, in person about starting a business.

To learn more about online ordering and upcoming events featuring Lil Red's Popcorn Emporium, visit <https://www.lilredspopcorn.com/> and "Lil Red's Popcorn Emporium" on Facebook.