

Mack City Chips - fresh, flavored potato chips

Open in the Crossings Food Court

It always intrigues me to discover how an entrepreneur arrives in Mackinaw City. In the case of Mack City Chips it was a confluence of three things:

- two sisters who decided the time was right to move from corporate careers into a venture of their own
- repeated visits to Mackinaw to visit a daughter working on Mackinac Island
- the discovery that there was a snacking void in Mackinaw, lots of candy options but not much else

It was the perfect time in life for Tina Hogoboom and Darcy Esterline to employ their corporate expertise and build on Darcy's teenage job skills from a specialty potato chip shop in Jackson, Michigan, their hometown. A specialty chip retail outlet in Mackinaw City seemed the perfect opportunity. They have the energy for and total passion for their product and dream.

They began in April 2017, signing a lease in the Crossings' food court in December 2017.

The chip business that Darcy remembered is now enveloped in many more rules and regulations than in 1986. The retail food establishment business is regulated by the Department of Agriculture, an



organization that has proven an invaluable teacher. By requiring numerous plans — a floor plan, a mechanical plan, a plumbing plan, and a lighting plan for example — the USDA assured the gals did detailed and thoughtful preparation. There was a lot to get ready. They moved here permanently in March with a target store opening in the week of Memorial Day; a target they achieved.

Success depends on freshness, hand care, and the seasonings. They offer traditional seasonings such as salt and vinegar, sour cream and



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by Sandy Planisek

onion, and hickory BBQ and they will offer specials such as dill pickle, or jalapeno, or Chicago steakhouse, or you suggest it.

The production process is straightforward. Receive, peel, slice, rinse, rinse again, fry, sort, and then season potatoes. They have experimented with the proper thickness and have now arrived at the perfect size. Hand sorting assures a high quality product because slices can get stuck together or develop bubbles. Imperfect chips are discarded before the cooked chips are moved to the front of the store and hand packaged into one of two sizes – trays for the “all mine” size or into bags for the larger “shareeze” size.

So far the feedback has been exceptional. Over the Memorial Day weekend people stopped in and made a snack purchase; they obviously enjoyed it because upon their departure from town they returned for some bags for home.

The ultimate dream for the sisters is

1. to make people aware of their business
2. spread to other restaurant distribution locations in town
3. make the business a success for the rest of their lives.

They repeatedly mentioned the help and suggestions they have gotten. Help from the Small Business Administration proved invaluable with classes and a personal counselor to help them set up and succeed. But they also got invaluable help from their neighboring businesses in the Crossings, from both the owner and manager of the Crossings, and from their first customers.

