

Kid in a Candy Store

Robin's mixes up confections, designer ice cream, and politics

BY CAROL GOODMAN KAUFMAN



[Robin's Candy in Great Barrington](#) has become a mecca for sweets-seekers in New England with its vast and varied inventory of confections. This year, the array of treats reflects a bit of fun with the presidential campaign.

Lollipops (both chocolate and hard candy) are emblazoned with the logos of the two major

parties, chocolate bars wrapped in “currency” feature the faces of the two major-party candidates, and chewing gum declares “I kissed a Democrat” or “I kissed a Republican.” Campaign tchotchkes are plentiful, too: donkey and elephant piñatas, Hillary action figures,



PHOTOS BY SCOTT BARROW

Trump bobbleheads, and toilet paper printed with the candidates' faces are among the non-edible items available.

One of Robin's newer offerings is customizable soft-serve ice cream and yogurt, with toppings that include West Stockbridge-made Baldwin's vanilla syrup. If you can dream it, you can have it. And name it. There's the "NPR Food Friday Interview," made with Lebanese halva whipped soft-serve with Turkish pistachio and drizzled with Persian rosewater. For the pregnant woman, there's "Great Expectations," vanilla-bean whipped with pickle relish. In keeping with the campaign theme, you can order a concoction named for your candidate. "The Donald" features Mexican



chocolate and fireballs, while the "Hillary" is vanilla-bean topped with marshmallow and nuts. "Feel the Bern" is made with Brooklyn-brewed coffee and Vermont maple syrup. Green tea topped with banana chips represents the Libertarian party.

What if you simply have a sweet tooth and want to get away from the election? Willy Wonka's chocolate factory has nothing on Robin's, where

you will find virtually anything your sugar-craving heart desires. Chocoholics will be captivated by the glass display case in the front of the store, never seeing the 65 varieties of licorice a few steps away. About 80 percent of the items are imported, primarily from England, Sweden, Holland, and Italy. The rest is made domestically, mostly in Pennsylvania Dutch country, which just happens to be the birthplace of the Twizzler.

With the crack of a licorice whip, you will travel from one generation's beloved candies to the next, from wax lips, mint juleps, and Mary Janes (classics) to Sour Patch Kids and gummy worms. One of the more recent entries in confections is the candy Lego-like building block.

Remember the Teaberry Shuffle? If you do, and if you loved the yummy pink gum for which the dance was named, head to Robin's quickly, as the last packs of Teaberry and its siblings, Clove, Beemans, and Black Jack—in the U.S.—are there.

And what about "Oh Oh Oh Bonomo," the jingle for Bonomo's Turkish taffy? After Tootsie Roll Industries unsuccessfully changed the ingredients, packaging, shape, and name of the candy, the

company shut down production. Then, in 2002, in response to pleas from fans, entrepreneurs Kenny Wiesen and Jerry Sweeney resurrected the “smack-it, crack-it” candy—now available at Robin’s.

Owner Robin Helfand finds her inventory at the Sweets & Snacks Expo in Chicago and the Summer Fancy Food Show in New York City. How she maintains her trim figure is a mystery, given that she and a panel of six people taste every candy before deciding whether to offer it in the store. She further evaluates items for quality. On a table in her office sit bon bons turned on their sides to gauge shape integrity, while lollipops are time-tested for freshness and clarity.

One of the shop’s best sellers is the “BeanBoozled” board game that Helfand says “flies off the shelves.” Developed by the people who make Jelly Belly jelly beans, this “hot craze” includes such flavors as rotten eggs and moldy cheese, along with the traditional blueberry and tutti-frutti.

The business is a family affair. Daughter Allye, with a master’s degree in fashion design, creates the visuals in the store. Daughter Jesse finds many of the imported products through her travels and keeps the store green via her studies in sustainable architecture. Son Drew does the shop’s sound system and social media. Robin’s mom Sandra designs the greeting cards and helps keep things relevant for the older crowd.

And dad Gene may have the coolest job. In charge of interactive displays, he has designed a Rube Goldberg-ian marble run that sits in the shop’s front window, and is now hard at work building a robot that will deliver ice-cream samples to customers. We’ll have a soft-serve with Nutella, please.

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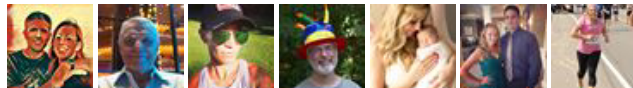


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10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Flora and Fauna: Drawings by Francesca Anderson



4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Artist's Reception



5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Infused With Passion



8:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Loretta Lynn



9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

The Newtown Yoga Festival



10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

EXHIBITION Fabulous Animals: The Illustrated World of Robert Lawson



10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Electric Paris



10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

OnSite Katonah



10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Victoria Fu – "Egg" at the Katonah Museum of Art



11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

OysterFest



12:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Ridgefield Guild of Artists' Walk on Down Exhibit



12:45 AM - 4:00 PM

Berkshire South Bridge Club



1:00 PM - 6:00 PM

New Milford Art Walk



3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Dinosaurs at the Beach



4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

PillowTalk: PS Dance!



5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Art Walk Ridgefield 2016



6:15 PM - 7:00 PM

Inside/Out Performance: Nico Brown



7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Viennese Waltz



8:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Joe Crookston Returns to The Guthrie Center



8:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Pacific Northwest Ballet



8:00 PM - 12:00 AM

FESTIVAL FINALE



8:15 PM - 10:00 PM

Souleymane Badolo



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Finding Raven: Art and Stories from the Northwest Coast	▼
The Nature of Glass: Contemporary Sculpture at Chesterwood	▼
Splendor, Myth, and Vision: Nudes from the Prado	▼
Sensing Place: Reflecting on Stone Hill	▼
Pacific Northwest Ballet	▼
Constellations	▼
Sleeping With Wolves	▼
Art Walk	▼
9:00 AM - 1:00 PM	John Jay Homestead Farm Market ▼
9:30 AM - 4:30 PM	Servicemen Remembered ▼
9:30 AM - 4:30 PM	Servicemen Remembered ▼
10:00 AM - 4:00 PM	IMAGES 2016 at the Fairfield Museum ▼
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM	Creative Coloring for Adults ▼
10:30 AM - 5:30 PM	Waterways IV ▼
11:00 AM - 6:00 PM	Sheffield Island Lighthouse Tour Ferry ▼
11:00 AM - 3:00 PM	It's in the Details ▼
11:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Barbara Vaughn: Synthesi ▼
1:00 PM - 4:00 PM	1750s Ogden House Tours ▼
1:00 PM	Gunn Memorial Library Stairwell Gallery Exhibit ▼
8:00 PM - 10:00 PM	Bye Bye Birdie ▼
8:00 PM - 10:30 AM	A Sign of the Times ▼
John Jay Homestead Farm Market	▼
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