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illustrations by JOHN OQUIST

Cookies, delivered

Insomnia Cookies adds sugar to drunk food menu

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Cookies, one of the most wholesome snack foods, have lost their innocence.

The sugary disks have joined the ranks of campus's late-night drunken munchies thanks to the opening of an Ann Arbor franchise of Insomnia Cookies, a company committed solely to delivering fresh-baked cookies in student neighborhoods at night.

Insomnia Cookies, created by students at the University of Pennsylvania in 2003, now operates on 13 campuses, including Michigan State University.

Long after Mrs. Fields has turned off the lights, the ovens of Insomnia Cookies are still yielding gooey morsels - from 8 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. And unlike the notoriously stationary Mrs. Fields, Insomnia Cookies is equipped with a mobile bakery based out of the delivery truck so customers can enjoy the treats without the risk of walking off their buzz.

At 90 cents a cookie, the company's menu offers all the essential flavors: sugar cookie, chocolate chunk, peanut butter chip, white macadamia nut, oatmeal raisin, M&M and double chocolate chunk. The most sinful of the cookie selection is undoubtedly the ménage à trios cookie - a three-way collaboration between chocolate chunk, M&M and double chocolate chunk. The rich chocolate chip brownies also hold their own.

Once overtaken by the craving, make the order by phone or through the website and you could be having a "ménage a trios" within 45 minutes.

Despite no official advertising campaign as of yet, word has gotten around fast about the new food option.

"You have to try Insomnia Cookies!" LSA sophomore Abby Martlew exclaimed last week to three friends she ran into in the Michigan Union. Martlew had discovered the company a few weeks earlier.

Harold Solomon, Insomnia Cookies' director of mobile bakery operations who mans the truck, was a little surprised by the already considerable enthusiasm.

"We're being very well received by the students even though there was no marketing campaign yet," Solomon said. "I had no idea the response would be this huge."

Solomon, a tall man with a hearty laugh and wide smile, works in the truck seven days a week, fielding orders all night.

An order pops up on the computer in the front of the truck or is printed out on a small fax printer on the dashboard, Solomon pulls the desired cookies out of a refrigerator inside the truck and pops them in an oven right next to the coolers. Eight minutes later the order is ready for delivery.

The company's operation, at least in Ann Arbor, is experimental. Insomnia Cookies has thirteen locations but only one mobile bakery. So far the trial has been a success and Solomon hopes to expand the lone truck into a fleet.

But there are a few kinks to work out, mainly because Insomnia Cookies' owners underestimated the positive response they'd see.

"We've had the typical startup problems," Solomon explained.

Phone ordering hasn't always worked out perfectly, with a few orders getting lost during times when a lot of calls are coming in. One night, the oven broke down.

Still, if business continues to go as it is, the fledgling bakery will have plenty of time to smooth out the operation's rough spots.

On an average night, Insomnia Cookies receives between twenty to fifty delivery orders.

Among a group of students who sampled Insomnia Cookies's menu, double chocolate chunk was the general favorite, but the oatmeal raisin and sugar cookies also got high marks.

LSA sophomore Emily Porritt said that the sugar cookies weren't sugary enough and needed sugar granules.

But in a gesture toward what ultimately matters most, Solomon is determined that the cookies be served fresh - he gives the day-old leftovers away at the police station.

Of course, anyone who's seen stale pizza slices that look like crusty cardboard get purchased during the late-night rush at New York Pizza Depot could tell Solomon that freshness isn't a huge priority for his clientele.