

## **Passionate baker happy at the helm of award-winning business**

Shanaaz Essa, the owner and CEO of Exquisite Cakes, fell in love with baking when she was a young girl helping her mother decorate cakes for the family.

“I used to do the simple things like chopping up the cherries and that’s how my passion for baking started,” says the entrepreneur, who’s based in Elfindale, a suburb in Cape Town’s so-called Deep South.

When she was a teenager, Shanaaz made Easter eggs that her father, a doctor, used to sell at his practice. “I suppose you can say that the entrepreneur bug bit early because I’ve always wanted to own a business and make my own products,” she explains.

After spending a few years in the corporate world, Shanaaz decided to approach coffee shops in Cape Town with her cakes and after receiving positive feedback, she contacted individual Checkers stores in 2009. “We were supplying to coffee shops at the V&A Waterfront and customers always had nice things to say so I knew our products were good enough for retail,” says Shanaaz.

She started supplying to a handful of Checkers stores in Cape Town and from 2015, her baked goods became available all over the Western Cape in Checkers, Shoprite and OK Food stores.

Shanaaz started ten years ago baking four cakes and employing six people. She now supplies 30 different types of cakes and biscuits, and employs 35 people. “We’ve grown tremendously over the years and we’re still growing thanks to the Shoprite Group and all the support they’ve given us.”

Exquisite Cakes recently won in the SMME category at the 2019 Shoprite Group’s Supplier Awards Western Cape and was also nominated in the Group’s overall supplier awards.

“Running a small business isn’t easy. We’ve had so many challenges over the years. We had to work through load-shedding and water shortages, but we persevered and this acknowledgement is such a big deal for us. We really didn’t expect it. It’s such a wonderful affirmation of the work we’re doing,” explains Shanaaz.

She is married with two sons at varsity and a daughter in Grade 10. She says she hasn’t had a proper holiday in about 16 years. “We employ 35 people and I have the responsibility of ensuring they always have a job because we’re a family here. I know that if I don’t work hard, all our jobs will be at risk.”

Her work ethic is such that her daughter has no interest in taking over the reins from her. “My daughter says I work too hard. She just wants a normal 9-to-5 job. She doesn’t want a life where she can’t even take sick leave,” says Shanaaz, jokingly. “But I enjoy my work. I love what I do and I’m never sitting still. I’m

always in the bakery, my hands are busy and I'm running the business at the same time."

Shanaaz is grateful for the support she's received from the Shoprite Group over the years and she believes that if entrepreneurs want to get into retail, they should be patient, constantly innovate with new products and understand that success is the result of hard work.

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**CAPTION:** Shanaaz Essa, owner of Exquisite Cakes, supplies halaal cakes in Checkers, Shoprite and OK Food stores and recently won in the SMME category of the 2019 Shoprite Group's Supplier Awards Western Cape.

**Social Media:** Shanaaz Essa, Western Cape winner in the SMME category of the Shoprite Group's Supplier Awards, has turned her passion for baking into a thriving business.