

DULCE MARIA

When Maria Leary was growing up in Colombia, she aspired to move to a different country and start a bakery. When she moved to the U.S. in 2012, she achieved step one. And with the launch of Dulce Maria this year, she is living out her childhood dream.

Maria works with her mother — also named Maria — to bake delicious South American desserts. Their table at the farmers market is stocked with airy meringues, colorful lollipops, and caramel-filled cookie sandwiches called alfajores.

Maria, the mother, had an empanada business in Colombia, so the younger Maria was able to learn about being a business owner through osmosis. And as a child, she sold her baked goods to friends and family to make a little extra money to supplement her allowance.

The mother-daughter team has been ruminating on this business idea for the past three years. They have even had the logo ready to go for the last two. But things clicked into place when the older Maria moved to Portland from Los Angeles this year.

The scariest part of it all was figuring out the permits and legal requirements for opening a business, the younger Maria said. English is her second language, so while she had been exposed to legal terms in Spanish while growing up, it was an added challenge to muddle through the legality in English. “It was double the work for me to get licenses and certificates and make sure I was doing the right thing,” she said.

Now, they have gotten into a groove, and come to the downtown market every week. Maria said it is exciting to explain the story behind the desserts to customers, and introduce them to something they might not have tried before. She has also enjoyed being a part of the farmers market community. When she steps away from her booth, she finds herself saying hi to many of the other vendors. “I don’t usually do that, but I’m comfortable doing it here,” she said.

