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Cookie king to share recipe for inspiration

By Kristofer Karol
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Wally "Famous" Amos is living the dream, spending his golden years in Hawaii.

But the man whose cookie is a staple on grocery shelves and in vending machines throughout the country isn't just kicking back on the beach. He's still baking — and eating — those ubiquitous chocolate-chip cookies.

"They are truly a part of my being," Amos said. "I love chocolate-chip cookies and I just think there's so much love involved in chocolate-chip cookies. ... I am doing what I am truly, truly passionate about."

In addition to baking up tasty treats, Amos, 72, is also an advocate of literacy and an author of several inspirational books. The latter is what Amos will focus on during his talk that opens the 2009 Livingston Economic Club Luncheon Series at noon Feb. 9 at Cleary University in Genoa Township.

"My talks always focus on inspiring people ... to feel good about themselves, and I think that's needed now more than ever before," Amos said. "I believe that the greatest culprit in life is low self-esteem."

It's not always just people that can inspire someone to do something great, said Amos, who recounted an experience in the redwood forests of California.

"I'm walking through these tall trees. I looked up. They are just some incredibly tall trees," he said. "These trees are still growing — God is not finished with these trees. The same God that lives in these trees, the same spirit that resides in these redwoods trees resides in me."

Amos, too, has lived a larger-than-life existence.

He was born in Tallahassee, Fla., but at the age of 12 moved to New York to live with his aunt, who was the first person to bake him a chocolate-chip cookie. After a stint in the Air Force, Amos worked in a department store stock room, then in the mailroom of a talent agency.

After some hard work, Amos worked his way up to a position as a talent agent and then left to open his own theatrical management agency. Finally, Amos moved to California, where he first started to experiment with baking cookies on the weekends.

In 1975, he opened a freestanding store on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, and Famous Amos Cookies was born. Battle Creek-based Kellogg Co. now owns the line while Amos operates Chip and Cookie, a small company based in Hawaii, where he's lived for more than three decades.

"This is the cookie that actually made me famous," Amos said. "I did not become famous selling what Famous Amos Cookies are today."

Amos has used his popularity to help better the world, promoting literacy, including serving as a national spokesperson for Literacy Volunteers of America from 1979-2002. He and his wife, Christine,

now operate the Read It Loud! Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting reading aloud to children.

"We always look for the complicated solution, but this is not a complicated solution," Amos said. "It's very clear-cut. Reading is the foundation of a successful life. I don't care what you do in life, you must establish the foundation first."

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Additional Facts

AT A GLANCE

- What: Wally Amos, originator of Famous Amos Cookies, opens the 2009 Livingston Economic Club Luncheon Series.
 - When: At noon Feb. 9; networking precedes the luncheon.
 - Where: Cleary University, off Grand River Avenue west of Latson Road in Genoa Township
 - Tickets: \$60. For tickets or sponsorship opportunities, contact Cleary's Dennis Purdy at (734) 929-9107 or at lec@cleary.edu.
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