

The sweet life

Shawn Askinosie may have found his calling. Again. As a successful criminal defense attorney and a partner at Askinosie and Bilyeu in Springfield, Mo., Askinosie had a reputation for taking on difficult cases. His cases were featured on *Dateline* and *Court TV*, and in 2001 he was named a lawyer of the year by *Missouri Lawyers Weekly*.

Around 2005, though, Askinosie, BA '83, JD '89, knew he wanted a change. He had been baking cupcakes with good quality chocolate as a hobby and grew more interested in the chocolate itself. But the idea to become a chocolate maker seemed to come out of the blue.

"I really think this idea to make chocolate was a gift. I can't explain it any other way." He knew nothing about chocolate. "For all I knew, chocolate bars grew on trees." Askinosie began a quest to learn the science of chocolate. He made batches of chocolate from the cacao bean in his home kitchen, and then moved his experiments to the law office

kitchen after his wife, Caron, said the kitchen looked like a "war zone."

Determined to understand the process from start to finish, he traveled to the Amazon in October 2005 and learned about cocoa tree agronomy, cocoa economy, cocoa genetic improvement, crop protection and postharvest techniques. Most importantly, he formed lasting relationships with people in the cocoa industry in Ecuador.

Askinosie Chocolate opened, with a storefront and attached factory, in Springfield in April 2007, offering dark chocolate bars made with beans from Ecuador. Chocolate bars from Mexican beans soon followed.

Askinosie periodically travels to South America and Mexico not only to inspect the crop but also to renew his connections with the growers. He shares 10 percent of his net profits with them in a program called "Stake in the Outcome."

"In many ways they are the happiest people I have ever met. They have little gardens in their yards and love to share food." Visiting these remote places



Photo by Mike Wingo

Shawn Askinosie's move from criminal attorney to chocolate aficionado has been an adventure that has taken him all around the world.

rejuvenates his spirit.

Askinosie plans to stick with the chocolate-making business. "I could see myself doing this until I can't stand up," he says. "And then I can sit down and still make chocolate." — *Jody Mace*

More: askinosie.com

Jeffrey Burden, BJ '82, of Richmond, Va., received the 2007 development volunteer of the year award from the Arthritis Foundation's national office. He serves on the foundation's national income development committee and is a partner at the Virginia Estate Plans PLC and Virginia Fiduciary PLC law firms in Richmond.

★**Lee Schaefer**, BA '82, of Belleville, Ill., received the workers' compensation distinguished lawyer award from the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis and Kids' Chance Inc. She is an assistant attorney general and director of the Division of Labor in the office of Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon.

Michael Pritchett, BJ '83, of Overland Park, Kan., wrote *The Melancholy Fate of Capt. Lewis:*

A Novel of Lewis and Clark (Unbridled Books, 2007). **Greg Michalson**, MA '78, of Columbia, edited the book.

David Wright, BS Ag '83, of Blue Springs, Mo., was elected to the board of directors of the Missouri State School Board Association. He has served on the Blue Springs R-4 Board of Education for the past seven years and is chief of financial operations for the USDA's Risk Management Agency in Kansas City, Mo.

★**Michael Kodas**, BJ, BJ '84, of Hartford, Conn., wrote *High Crimes: The Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed* (Hyperion, 2008). An avid climber, he is a reporter and photographer for the *Hartford Courant*, and his work has also appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Newsweek*.

★**Ken Flottman**, BA '85, of Nairobi, Kenya, is resident director of the East Africa office of the International Republican Institute, a nonprofit organization that promotes the development of democracy.

★**Laura Pickard Meyer**, BA '85, BS Ed '86, of Glenview, Ill., is past president of the Illinois Podiatric Medical Association. She was featured in the Spring 2007 newsletter of the American Association for Women Podiatrists.

John J. Diehl Jr., BA '87, of Ballwin, Mo., joined Armstrong Teasdale LLP as a partner.

Tanja Ingeborg Heinen, BJ '88, and husband David of Fairway, Kan., announce the birth of Mirabelle Gisela Sept. 16, 2007.

Laura Stewart Knowles, A&S '89, and husband T.K. Knowles of Pacific Palisades, Calif., announce the birth of Tiger Stephen Stewart