

Following the Sweetest of Dreams:
Love at First Bite
 MERCANTILE

One step inside Love at First Bite and you're transported into a world of sweet nostalgia. You can't help but smile at the jars of honey straws that conjure up sticky memories or those British sweets you never thought you'd find on this side of the Atlantic. Unique keepsakes fill the shelves—vintage clocks, delightful wall hangings, and even old-fashioned gum. Everything has that one-of-a-kind specialness.

As you wind past displays of artisan soap and locally made jewelry, your taste buds will tingle at the sight of glass-bottled sodas and homemade fudge.

At the back counter, you'll find what put Love at First Bite on the map. Cupcakes heaped with frosting, chocolate-dipped pretzels, specialty caramel apples, exquisite chocolates and truffles, vintage candies, gourmet cookies, homemade toffees—all made from family recipes. But if you want to get to the heart of the store, just take a look at the people behind the counter.

Mike and Juli Richards are the husband-and-wife team behind Love at First Bite. Their dedication to their business is obvious, but their dedication to each other is even more impressive. Juli and Mike are a rare team. They champion each other's talents and passions. The warm looks and secret smiles they share tell so much more than their words do.

Big Dreams and Humble Beginnings

Hailing from St. Anthony and Newdale, respectively, Mike and Juli met as teenagers. They married and moved to Logan, Utah, where Juli taught herself how to arrange



silk flowers. At only twenty years old, she hosted in-home parties and styled and catered weddings.

Mike instantly recognized the potential in his wife's passion. After graduating from Utah State, they opened J. Michael's—a retail store selling silk flower arrangements, artificial trees, and home décor. Their flagship store in Rigby doubled as their home where they raised four children in the apartment above the store. They expanded into Driggs and Idaho Falls, running the family business for twelve years.

Several years later, Juli's sweet tooth got the better of her, and she began thinking about selling homemade chocolates and candies. When Juli wasn't in the kitchen, her daughter Madalyn was creating powdered-sugar chaos as she honed cupcake recipes.

The Corner-Store Mercantile

Love at First Bite opened in November 2010. One of the first stores in the Snake River Landing development, it took an essential role in creating the homey feel of the charming business park. Though Love at First Bite sells plenty of

sweet treats, the Richards' shop is so much more than a sugar palace.

With her keen eye for interior design, Juli shapes the trends of the area by finding exciting new lines at design shows. One of the most beloved new offerings is a line of baby clothes. When asked how she knows what to offer, she humbly shrugs and says, "I find things that I love."

In 2012, Mike's love for Italian culture prompted Love at First Bite to move to a larger location, just two doors down, where they began offering gourmet olive oils, balsamic vinegars, cheeses, and pastas. With twenty-five varieties of oil (favorites include garlic-infused olive oil and black truffle oil) and twenty-five varieties of balsamic vinegars (customers love cranberry pear), it's a foodie's paradise.

A Foundation of Family

Love at First Bite just celebrated its fourth anniversary. Looking back, Juli is surprised by how much she enjoys the store day after day. Running a small business takes a lot of work, but it has glued the Richards family together. "We are adamant about spending time together. Sometimes it's camping. A lot of times it's working. But we do it together. It's been a fun way to raise kids."

It's busy this time of year. The counter tops are covered in gift baskets and Christmas inventory crowds the shelves. Even with the extra holiday work, Juli and Mike welcome their customers. They love talking with them. And they know that new customers are old friends they just haven't met yet.



Custom Gift Baskets are a holiday favorite for local shoppers and businesses. Ranging from \$15—\$110 these baskets not only simplify holiday shopping, they deliver a sweet taste of Idaho Falls virtually anywhere in the United States. Love at First Bite is located at 901 Pier View Drive, Ste.101, Idaho Falls, ID.



Juli and Mike Richards: the husband-and-wife team behind Love at First Bite.

www.loveatfirstbitemercantile.com