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HEY, BATTER BATTER ...

At last, good news for cupcake aficionados living in Tampa Bay: our very own cup-cakery.

Just like its trendy neighboring stores, The Cupcake Spot, which opened in December, is as much boutique as bakery, its bubblegum-pink and baby-blue interior with black-and-white checkerboard floors reminiscent of a 1950s soda fountain. Outside, The Cupcake Spot's mascot, "Cuppy," beckons the hungry corporate, family and merely curious customer into a mecca of happy childhood memories evoked by the sight and smell of hundreds of icing-topped tiny cakes.

Leave it to Nicole Rogers, a former public relations executive and branding expert, to bring the national cupcake craze to town. Slightly burned out by her 18-year career, Rogers did some soul-searching for a new business — and found her answer after reading an article in *USA Today* about cupcakes.

Together with longtime boyfriend Doug Longo, she began experimenting with a variety of flavors, farming them out for taste-testing to friends, family, neighbors and ultimately Chef Marty Blitz and his staff at *Mise en Place*. "Some didn't make the cut," Rogers laughs.

But many did, including customer favorites like Berry Squared (strawberry cake with raspberry cream cheese icing), Red Velvet, and Rogers' personal pick: the Better Than cupcake, a recipe she coveted for years before her best friend's mother acquiesced. "It is so dense and moist and the chocolate chips aren't overwhelming," Rogers says. "The frosting is like drinking milk with it."

A knock-it-out-of-the-park home run. — *Julie W. Martin*

The Cupcake Spot, 2401 South Dale Mabry Highway, Tampa, thecupcakespotinc.com, 813-258-3111.



Confections at The Cupcake Spot include S'mores (front), Va-Va-Vanilla, The Chocolate Elvis and more.

MARK SICKLES