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## Coming home, selling snacks

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Black pepper and sea salt aren't ingredients you expect to find in granola, but they work for Simply Suzanne.

The Detroit-based company -- founded two years ago today by 38-year-old Detroit resident Suzanne Vier, who moved back after more than a decade working in human resources and marketing in New York -- is set to debut its handcrafted crunchy snack on Meijer shelves next month.

"We use spice in our granola, which makes us very unique in the marketplace," Vier said, explaining its savory, fuller flavor profile. "I found granola to be much sweeter than I liked it to be. By adding (spice), it made it more snackable. I don't think about it anymore as just a breakfast cereal, but as a snack to eat during the course of the day."

A foodie who tinkered with the recipes in batches for her New York friends, she launched the company in 2009 with Randy TenBrink, a friend from her Grand Valley State University days. Randy's Granola was rechristened Simply Suzanne last year after he left the company.

Vier now employs half a dozen people and is looking to double that number immediately.

Simply Suzanne, which earned more than \$48,000 in revenue last year, has a warehouse in New Center and production facilities in Westland and Hart on the west side of the state. Vier is proud of her homecoming.

"I have a rich family history here," she said. "I was really committed and have always been a staunch supporter of Detroit. In terms of opening a new business in New York versus Detroit, there were people who I knew would be looking for work. There's an amazing talent pool in Detroit, and that's something people don't realize."

And elsewhere in Michigan, others are taking notice -- and inviting her in.

"That's a pretty neat thing, especially for a local, up-and-coming company in Michigan," said Meijer spokesman Dave Peterson.

The sweet and savory mix is sold at approximately 100 grocery and specialty stores in the Detroit, Chicago and New York areas, though it also can be found on various restaurant menus throughout Michigan -- sometimes in unusual places. For example, Simply Suzanne granola has cameos in the crust of a salmon dish served at a western Michigan country club and in a cocktail at Roast in the Westin Book Cadillac.

Plus, the company represents the intersection of several key food trends that are hot right now. According to Vier, the four flavors (Original, Lotsa Chocolate, So Very Cherry and Dark Chocolate and Coffee) are not only made with locally grown ingredients whenever possible, but are also high in fiber and preservative-free.

A single serving packet is \$1.99-\$2.49, while a 12-ounce package is \$5.99-\$6.99. The food service size is \$35-\$37.