

Lifebeat FOOD

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SECTION E

Thoughts to chew on, from Bon Appétit

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When I read that Bon Appétit's May issue picked its Best Eats in all 50 states, I was a bit taken aback by its choice of Glee Gum in the Triple Berry flavor for What to Buy in Rhode Island. When did gum become food? I wondered.

Then I met up with Debbie Schimberg, owner of Glee Gum, and I learned so very much not just about the gum but about Schimberg and her passion for supporting all things sustainable. She is the founder of the Southside Community Land Trust, which started as a neighborhood garden and is now a national model for its urban farming programs.

Her Glee Gum is also groundbreaking — for how it uses an ingredient that supports sustainable harvest across the border. It's all natural, made from chicle, which flows from trees in the rainforest of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. Because the trees are tapped for chicle, they provide ongoing income for the local farmers who harvest the chicle. Keeping the trees for chicle harvest, rather than cutting them down for lumber, supports the rainforest.

Her Providence-based company, Verve, also donates a percentage of profits to scholarships for the families of chicle farmers.

Glee Gum is the only gum that uses chicle, Schimberg said. "Other gums are made with loads of unpronounceable items," she added. Her gum has no artificial



SEE GLEE GUM, E4



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / MARY MURPHY

Providence-based Verve company makes Glee Gum from chicle from trees of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. The treat is one of three Rhode Island products selected by Bon Appétit magazine for special recognition.

Glee Gum is all-natural, eco-friendly

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coloring or flavoring and no preservatives or aspartame.

Schimberg happened on chicle back in 1993 while visiting Guatemala with the Kellogg Foundation program. She saw farmers tap trees for chicle, which flows out like maple. Then they boil it down and mold it into blocks. She brought back such a block of chicle and made gum with her three young kids. And so the idea for all-natural Glee Gum was born.

Until the time after World War II when the food industry sought better products through chemistry, chicle was used for gum, Schimberg said.

Today, Glee Gum is sold all over the U.S., including at natural-food stores like Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's.

On her Web site, glee gum.com, you can buy Chewing Gum Kits to make your own gum at home. Locally, find it at Dave's Marketplace stores and a host of coffee shops, gift stores and natural-food markets or use

the zip code-powered store finder at glee gum.com.

But is gum food?

"You don't digest the gum base," Schimberg admitted. "But you get flavor."

It comes in a variety of flavors, including the winning Triple Berry as well as cinnamon, peppermint, bubblegum, tangerine and spearmint.

She also says, "Gum is a cheap treat. It's a buck for a pack."

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Deborah Schimberg is the founder and owner of Verve company, Providence-based maker of Glee Gum.