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SERVING THE LOWCOUNTRY

TASTE OF THE SEASON

Annual event highlights local chefs – and this year, the area’s best bakers

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Taste of the Season will be a bit sweeter this year.

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce’s 20th annual Taste of the Season on Friday brings together 30 local chefs to prepare samples of their best dishes. But this year brings a new twist.

The chamber has challenged some of the island’s best bakers to a Best Holiday Cake bake-off, so to say. Each will present a cake at the event, and attendees will vote on which is best.

With so much confectionery talent on display, we couldn’t help but gather some of their knowledge on a wide range of subjects, from life as a cake maker to the necessary evils of fondant.

Behold, our informal roundtable of Hilton Head’s best cake decorators: Sheri Davis, Sheri’s Edible Designs; Signe Gardo, Signe’s Heaven Bound Bakery and Cafe; Ann Marie Romano, Sandstone Catering; Holly Slayton, Sweet Carolina Cupcakes; Andrea Studenc, Little Students Cooking Cafe & Sweet Treats; and Jen Zoole, The Sea Pines Resort.

Question. What’s popular in the Lowcountry?

Gardo. It was a good year, but it wasn’t as many had the huge cakes. Smaller weddings. A lot of people scaled back.

Romano. A lot of a seashell cakes are popular for the destination weddings. Also, a lot of flavors with each tier being a different flavor instead of the entire cake being vanilla. I’ve had one that’s been red velvet, carrot cake, chocolate. A lot of variety.

Studenc. One of our biggest requests are our confetti cakes, the ones with polka dots. We do a lot of birthday cakes. After that it’s princess cakes. Also, a lot of sports-themed cakes.

Zoole. People go for simple but contemporary for wedding cakes. Plain white buttercream with fresh flowers, for example. Also, maybe something different, like stripes of fondant.

Q. What are your wildest cakes?

Davis. Definitely things that are tilted. Things that are separated by shapes and patterns. I did a wedding cake this year where it looked like strawberries. The theme of the wedding was chocolate-covered strawberries. They didn’t want the cake to look like a cake. They wanted people to look at it and say, “Is that a cake?”

Studenc. A lady came in and said, “I have a strange request for a cake.” She said, “Can you do a snail?” It was this group of ladies that go up to North Carolina for this retreat called The Snail’s Pace. That’s where it came about. And, yes, you could eat the whole snail.

Q. Wedding cupcakes: Fad or forever?

Davis. I do get a lot of requests for wedding cupcakes. But I don’t do them anymore. It was kind of big a few years ago, but I think things have trickled off a bit. I don’t know if that’s because word gets around that I don’t do them anymore or because the popularity is in decline.

Gardo. We do cupcakes for wedding cakes often. It’s popular. It eliminates a cutting fee; it speeds up the evening. It’s much more fun than a piece of cake. But you can’t do much with them, decoration-wise. A cupcake is still a cupcake.



Signe Gardo of Signe’s Heaven Bound Bakery and Cafe on Hilton Head Island decorates a cake. The bakery will present a cake at this year’s Taste of the Season on Friday.



Jen Zoole of The Sea Pines Resort created this wedding cake. She will be entering a cake in the Best Holiday Cake Competition at Taste of the Season on Friday. The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors the event, has challenged local bakers to create cakes to tempt the sweet tooth.

Slayton. Cupcakes used to just be a kids’ treat. People have taken it to another level. They’ve found an adult market. In a lot of these informal weddings, where people might be standing around talking as opposed to a sit-down dinner, it’s easier to carry around with you.

Q. Is fondant worth it?

Davis. Traditionally fondant is disgusting and tastes like glue. I make mine from marshmallow and powdered sugar, so it doesn’t taste so bad. If I can get away with buttercream, I’ll do that anytime.

Studenc. I love working with fondant. You can do a lot with it. I don’t really like covering an entire cake with it unless I have to because when you do eat it, it is chewy. I’ll do it on my cupcakes, too, ribbons, flowers, stuff to make them fun.

Slayton. If I make it, I like it. I don’t like the commercial; it doesn’t have the same flavor. If you make it your own, you can control the flavor better.

Q. “Cake Boss,” “Ace of Cakes” ... Do you watch these shows?

Davis. To be honest, I try not to watch. I do appreciate them for their entertainment value. But it gives an unrealistic portrayal of what goes into making a cake. I’ll get customers who come to me wanting a 5-foot cake of a dolphin jumping out of the water and when they get the price quote, they’ll say, “I saw it on ‘Ace of Cakes’ and it looked so easy.” You have to tell them it’s just the magic of television.

Studenc. My kids are obsessed with them, as I am. I wonder how much cake is in some of those cakes, and I really wonder how they taste.

Q. What’s in store for the Best Holiday Cake?

Romano. It’s a snowflake-like winter wonderland cake. Five tiered with different flavored mousses.

Zoole. I have some ideas. Just something kind of fun but elegant. It’s probably going to involve penguins. It’s kind of difficult. Usually you’re given an idea to work with, but it’s different when you’re essentially given free range.

TASTE OF THE SEASON

Taste of the Season will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday at Sea Pines Country Club on Hilton Head Island.

Tickets are \$35 and are available at Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce headquar-

ters, the Hilton Head Island Welcome Center and Bluffton Chamber Office.

To purchase tickets online, go to www.hiltonheadisland.org.

Details: 843-785-3673



Sheri Davis of Sheri’s Edible Designs will enter a cake in Taste of the Season’s Best Holiday Cake competition this year.



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