



Gerson Goldberg



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Artist with bread knife

Local cake maker reaches the finals in Martha Stewart's 'Dreamers into Doers' awards contest

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

Don't expect to see splattered tarps, easels, and brushes soaking in grimy jars when you enter BethAnn Goldberg's Menlo Park art studio. Nor should you anticipate the odor of oil paint or fresh plaster.

Instead, inhale deeply and take in the aroma of things sweet and comforting. Then, meet Ms. Goldberg — an artist who dispenses her colors through the tip of a pastry bag and chisels her sculptures with a bread knife.

Ms. Goldberg recently moved her studio from her Willows neighborhood home kitchen to a Gilbert Avenue storefront around the corner from her house. It's a light-filled building that now bears the sign, Studio Cake.

There, she mixes and measures, beats and finesse ingredients common and not so common into squares, rounds, and rectangles. Once transformed into cakes in the oven, they are transformed again into sculptures, sometimes in traditional forms such as multi-tiered wedding cakes, and sometimes shaped — with a bread knife — into animals of the wild, cars, circus caravans and watering cans.

National limelight

This has been an eventful time for the former mechanical engineer and mother of two. On Oct. 14 — after weeks of setting up her new work space with the help of her husband, Gerson Goldberg, and other family and friends — she fired up the commercial Studio Cake oven and baked her first cake in the new shop.

She also worked that morning with her son, Josh, on preliminary steps to create the birthday cake, modeled on a Ford Mustang GT500, that he will soon devour on his seventh birthday.

At the same time, she was anticipating the arrival, the following week, of a film crew from "The Martha Stewart Show," on assignment to film a segment on Ms. Goldberg and Studio Cake to be aired soon — part of the program's coverage of the 11 finalists in Ms. Stewart's national "Dreamers into Doers" awards.

Ms. Goldberg was chosen from more than 2,225 entries after submitting a 250-word essay and photos highlighting her work.

The contest recognizes "extraordinary women who turned their specific passions into a career, business or philanthropic program," according to a press release. The grand prize winner will receive \$10,000; the 10 runners-up will receive \$1,000. All winners will win vacations of varying lengths.

The finalists will be highlighted, and the grand prize



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One of BethAnn Goldberg's most unusual creations was a wedding cake in the shape of a giant turtle. See her other creations on the left.

winner announced, on the Nov. 12 show, according to the press release.

Sweet career

Ms. Goldberg shares her new storefront space with Cindy Davis, who makes astonishing-looking candies for wholesale for her business, Xocolata.

As Ms. Davis is creating her Halloween and Thanksgiving confections on a recent afternoon, Ms. Goldberg is explaining the evolution of her career as a cake maker.

More than a decade ago, Ms. Goldberg says, she found herself increasingly unhappy in her career, which included stints at NASA and, later, Applied Materials. Educated at Stanford to excel as an engineer, she had never taken classes on the art of baking or cooking.

When her daughter, Elley, now 8, was nearing her first birthday, Ms. Goldberg decided to make a cake that reflected how special her first child was. She made a giant caterpillar. "I just wanted to see my baby smeared in green icing," she says with a laugh.

By the time Elley's second birthday rolled around, the toddler was in the kitchen helping her mother bake a "dirt cake" to celebrate.

As time went on, Ms. Goldberg immersed herself in cake-baking projects, developing recipes and themes, and offering her cakes for sale by special order. Among the creations found in her photo album are a shark, an alligator,

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Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

BethAnn Goldberg, creator and owner of Studio Cake, poses inside the bakery with her creations.

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a monkey and a puppy in a purse; a 1957 Chevy, a clown seated on a ball, and Oscar the Grouch in a trash can.

One of her most unusual creations was a wedding cake in the shape of a giant turtle, which bore a miniature traditional wedding cake on its back. It was made for a couple who had assumed they were going to order a traditional cake, until they saw what their cake-maker was capable of.

A turtle was chosen — although Ms. Goldberg had never made such a creature before — because the bride-to-be was fond of them. But, the bride

warned, don't tell her mother, because she was paying for it, and she was a very traditional person, Ms. Goldberg says.

When the mother called Ms. Goldberg before the wedding to ask how to describe the cake on the menu she was having printed, the cake-maker hesitated. "Lemon," she finally said, "with lemon butter cream."

The turtle was a hit and the mother loved it, Ms. Goldberg happily reports.

Bigger quarters

Although she has done well as a small-business cake maker over the last several years, Ms. Goldberg was eager to find a larger space to work in. "I have the tiniest kitchen," she says, adding that her counter space is made up of "six discontinuous linear feet" — a challenge when your task is to sculpt a large turtle out of cakes and attach four finely made reptilian feet.

She had been thinking about moving the operation to a different location for some time, and when the Gilbert Avenue space — a former accountant's office — became available, she made her move.

Standing in the spacious shop, raising bent arms sideways like wings, she says, "I can finally put my elbows out."

To this day, the only baking class time Ms. Goldberg has logged is a two-hour course on fondant, the firm, sugary concoction that typically tops specialty cakes, and often tastes terrible.

Since then, she has developed her own recipe to avoid the "toxic" formula typically used by commercial bakers.

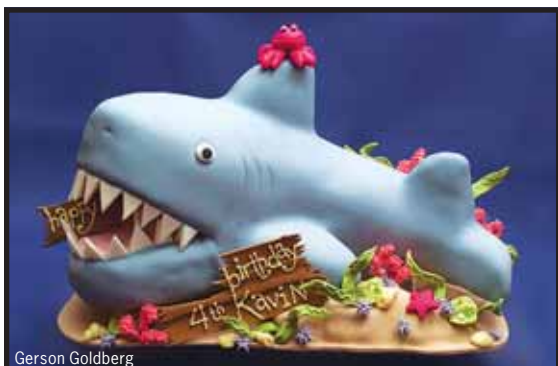
In lieu of classes, she tunes into the Food Channel religiously, she says, adding, "And Martha Stewart, too."

She can't say for sure why she developed such a love of cakes. She didn't bake as a child, although she loved taking ceramics classes, she says. When pressed to explain the appeal of cakes, she pauses, then says: I've always loved the structure of wedding cakes. There's a real dichotomy [at work] with them.

"They're gooey and homey on the inside, but they're something structured on the outside." And of course, they make people happy. ■

INFORMATION

Studio Cake is not a retail shop. For more information, call 575-5700, e-mail bethann@studiocake.com or go to www.studiocake.com.



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