

lowdown

M A A Z I N E

WINTER 2010

Buy Local for the Holidays
Remodeling Gone to the Dogs
Lothar's Gourmet Sausages

Dream

Weddings



FEATURES

26 BUY LOCAL FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by Therese P. Howe

Circulate goodwill this season by stuffing Christmas stockings with gifts made in Loudoun or from local retailers.



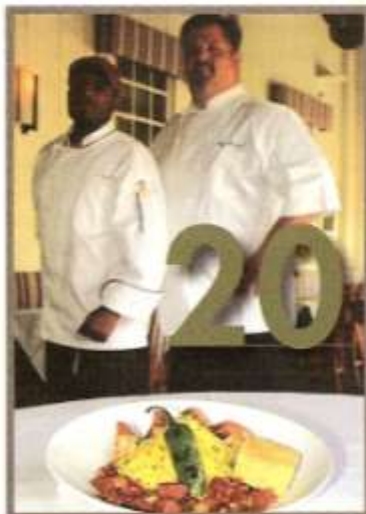
ABOUT THE COVER

Sara Frank was stunning at her fall wedding at Whitehall Manor in Bluemont. Bouquet by Holly Heider Chapple Flowers; photography by Kristen Gardner Photography.

37 DREAM LOUDOUN WEDDINGS

by Therese P. Howe

Brides going to the Chapple know they're in good hands because this Lucketts florist and event designer puts the perfect in perfectionist. Plus, Holly Heider Chapple's partner picks and advice from local wedding vendors.



DEPARTMENTS

6 CALENDAR

10 NEIGHBORS

by Lalaine Estella Ricardo

Award-winning bakers sweeten Loudoun's reputation with their state pie.

13 HEALTH & BEAUTY

by Lalaine Estella Ricardo

Lasdowne holistic psychotherapist leads patients on an inspirational journey.

20 DINING

by Buzz McClain

Hamilton master butcher blends Old World techniques for modern tastes.

53 HOME

by Buzz McClain

Remodeling projects that are for the dogs – and cats!

Neighbors

BLUE RIBBON BAKERS

BY LALAIN ESTELLA RICARDO

Knowing that 1st AVE Bakery's Peanut Supreme Pie had won numerous awards, including first place at the State Fair of Virginia in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2009, raises your expectations exponentially even before your first taste.

Just how good can one pie be anyway? Can it make claim to be the Virginia state pie?

With one bite of the champion pie you'll know that 1st AVE's winning baker, Violet LaBrecque, has created no ordinary dessert. The smooth and creamy texture of the filling is as light as a mousse but with more substance, and it sits above a layer of peanut fudge and peanut butter to anchor it down. The pie is topped with crunchy, crumbly, sea-salted Virginia-grown nuts, all cradled in a perfectly light, buttery crust. It is a fine example of umami — that pleasant savory flavor blending with the sweet and salty ingredients of the pie.

An entire state was not wrong. For sure, this humble pie lives up to the hype.

LaBrecque, 55, and her husband, Bob, 58, own and operate 1st AVE Bakery, which is named for the three bakers in the family — Violet and daughters Amanda, 25, and Elizabeth, 22. The family has been baking competitively for more than 21 years and started the bakery in 2008. They sell their pies, breads, brownies, cakes, cookies and candies out of their Purcellville home during the week and at

FOR MORE INFO

Visit 1stavebakery.com to see what they're baking this week or visit their booth at the Purcellville Community Market on Saturdays.

Purcellville's Community Market on Saturdays. Except for what's sold at the market, all products are made-to-order.

"Sometimes she makes 60 to 70 crusts a week," says Bob, who, with his sweet tooth, is the company's official taste tester. "She's got great form on the table, and has the operation down to a science." Violet can peel, core and slice as many as 50 Granny Smith apples in under an hour. And 50 apples are

about what she needs to make just six apple pies. They are heavy desserts, weighing in at about 2 pounds apiece.

In Violet's kitchen, you'll find a simple stand-up fruit slicer and her trusty 20-year-old KitchenAid Professional mixer that she bought when KitchenAid offered 50 percent off to contestants at a state fair. The only modern appliances in the kitchen are the double black ovens that are in use most days of the week. Violet also has a custom-made, maple-topped Boos Blocks baker's table that was cut to be low enough for her to comfortably roll pie crusts on.

The LaBrecque home kitchen is inspected and certified by the Department of Agriculture and is certified by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as a home-based bakery and purveyors of "hand-crafted pies with a melt-in-your-mouth crust."

While it would be easy to modernize their home-based operation to crank out more pies, breads and other treats, Bob and Violet adhere to the principle that everything they sell is made by hand — their hands. All the breads are hand-kneaded, and the pie crusts rolled out one at a time. "We're doing this because it's fun to do," Bob says. "We can't make 100 pies a day because that becomes a real job. We want to make the best in Virginia, and we can't do that in a factory."

Violet got her start baking when she was in her early 20s and had wanted to enter a contest at the Prince William County Fair. When someone told her there was no way she could win against ladies who had been baking for decades, she took that on as a challenge and entered anyway. "It was kind of a dare," she says. "I entered the contest but didn't win. I did bread before I did pie, and it was horrible."

Now a champion-class bread maker, Violet and her daughters, who themselves have won their share of state fair contests as teens and young adults, have been featured in local and regional newspapers, magazines and a book. As teens, the girls were featured in *I Want to Be ... a Chef*, a book about exploring careers in the culinary arts. "They've been helping in the kitchen since the time they could stand at the table," Violet says. "When they were growing up, we all would spend a lot of time in the kitchen." While Elizabeth and



BOB AND VIOLET LABRECQUE

Amanda have moved on to other pursuits and careers in California and Hawaii, they continue to bake in their communities, and whenever they are home.

Violet earned her first state fair ribbon with a pecan pie recipe that she uses to this day. Since her first prize, she has taught cooking and baking classes for years, freely sharing her recipes with her students, but since the bakery opened, she has been hesitant to do so.

Bob says their award-winning recipes have been published in numerous magazines, cookbooks and newspapers such as the *Washington Post*. Each time they've entered a contest, they have had to give corporate sponsors the right to publish their recipes.

"The recipes are out there," Bob says. But even if you followed the recipe, he adds, you won't get Violet's "artistic touch" that gives the pies that extra edge on the state fair circuit.

When pressed for her secrets or tips, Violet did offer this: "The most important ingredient is not the right temperature, brand of flour or shortening you use. The most important variable is the moisture and water. And the weather has something to do with it, too." She also said that "the pie crust will tell you it's ready. You have to know the signs."

For the most part, the couple has retired this year from entering state fair contests and has focused their attention on helping others win the coveted blue ribbon. They are coaching contestants on the finer points of presentation. "There's a lot of logistics in a pie or baking competition," Bob says. "You have to know how each of your ingredients will perform."

Violet also has demonstrated to elementary students how easy it is to make a pie. "We want to see kids bake," she says. "We want to inspire the next generation of bakers." 