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LaBrecque Sisters Win Big at 2007— Virginia State Fair

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Staff Writer

The 2007 State Fair of Virginia, returned to the Richmond Raceway Complex Thursday, September 27 through Sunday, October 7. Now in its 153rd year, the State Fair of Virginia was an 11-day event showcasing the best of Virginia's animals and agriculture. Over the last five years, the State Fair has averaged over 250,000 visitors annually.

Featuring popular competitions for tasty baked goods, intricate quilts and embroidery, all kinds of paintings and photography, Virginia-grown crops and vegetables, rooster crowing, boot-stomping fiddle and banjo, and all kinds of livestock and barnyard favorites, the State Fair has every opportunity for dedicated hobbyists to bring home a coveted blue ribbon.

Purcellville sisters, Amanda and Elizabeth LaBrecque once again brought home multiple first place awards for their baking and candy making in the State Fair this year.
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Elizabeth LaBrecque in front of the Winners Pie Case at the 2007 Virginia State Fair. This is the second time Elizabeth has won "Best of Section" for the LaBrecque's original Peanut Pie.

LaBrecque Sisters Win Big at 2007 Virginia State Fair —

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Amanda, age 22, and Elizabeth, age 19, maintained their State Champion titles for another year with first place awards in 15 separate categories.

Amanda LaBrecque has been a consistent State Champion for the past 16 consecutive years. In the 2007 Adult Competition, Amanda won First Place in six categories: Devils Food Cake, Yellow Iced Cake, Chocolate Hazelnut Cake, Lemon Chess Pie, Dinner Rolls, and Loaf of Braided Yeast Bread, which also won "Best of Section."

Elizabeth LaBrecque has also been a consistent State Champion for the past 12 years. 2007 was the last year that Elizabeth was eligible to compete in the Youth Competition. For the 2007 competition, Elizabeth won First Place in nine categories: Photography (Black & White Floral Bx10); loaf of white bread, dinner rolls; candy-mints; candy - hazelnut bontbons; Peanut Butter Cookies; Devils Food Cake (also won "Best of Section"); Lemon Chess Pie; and Peanut Pie, which also also won "Best of Section."

The Devils Food cake that won was described quite well by their Father Bob LaBrecque who is also the families official "Taste Tester." LaBrecque says both the cake and the frosting were quite dark in color. They use the new dark cocoa from Hershey's to obtain this color and flavor. They also used a small amount of strong black coffee to help further define the flavor and add to the richness. The texture was extremely moist and light. The frosting recipe is smooth and creamy on the tongue but not sticky or overly sweet. The roses used for decoration were each handmade from chocolate clay that we make and each petal was formed by the girls to obtain the desired bloom effect. The roses were edible and melted in your mouth.

Both sisters started helping in the kitchen when they were very young. They were barely able to stand on a chair at the kitchen table. They learned their baking and candy making skills from their Mother. Amanda and Elizabeth have a lot of fun in the kitchen experimenting with and trying new recipes. The girls also do canning and candy making. The last few years at the State Fair their Candy and Chocolate molded Candy Dishes have also won "Best of Show." The girls were disappointed that candy dish category was not included in the State Fair competition this year.

Both girls started baking with the family standard which the LaBrecque's refers to as "Old Yellow." It is the family's basic family yellow cake recipe that has won "Grand Champion" three times over the years and is really good even before adding any frosting or other decoration.

"My wife used to compete in the local, regional and state fairs but stopped when the girls were able to bake on their own. You can only put so many items through the ovens (we have two) in the day or so before a competition," said LaBrecque. He added, "My wife and I are now responsible for keeping a continuous supply of clean pots, pans and other utensils at the ready."

Competing in the Virginia State Fair is not the only competition they have entered in the baking careers. Both sisters have competed at the Loudoun County Fair since they were very young. They were not in 4-H so they competed in the Adult categories. If you go back over the past 10 to 15 years you will find their names listed for winning First Place for their Cakes, Pies and Breads many times over the years. The girls have also won the Fruit Pie contest several times at the regional Lucketts Fair. When Amanda was in high-school she also won First Place for her Apple Pie at the Mountain State Apple Harvest Festival.

"You have to bake your pie on-site for this competition. We kept her out of school one day to compete in this contest," said Bob LaBrecque.

The young bakers offer some helpful tips to the readers. "Don't let mistakes discourage you... they happen to the best of us. Use quality ingredients. You don't really need a lot of special equipment to make good tasting items.

We have all heard the expression 'Easy as Pie'. It is really true."

In addition, the sisters add that the best tips they can give the Purcellville Gazette readers for making cakes is to use absolutely fresh eggs. They say there is a marked difference in flavor.

When asked what cakes they like baking the best they both said it was the one they get to eat! As for flavor they both agreed on chocolate.

Most of the winning recipes (Cakes, Pies and Bread) are joint creations of the family. The LaBrecque family experiments with recipes and

does taste testings to see what works or not. There are so many recipes available to select from. "We've found that most recipes need a little tweaking to bring out a certain flavor or characteristic. A lot has to do with your technique and the type of ingredients that are used. We try to use absolutely fresh ingredients if possible," said LaBrecque.

Both sisters are graduates of Loudoun Valley High School and are currently attending college at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Amanda is completing her Graduate studies and Elizabeth is a sophomore majoring in Anthropology. The sisters took time out of their busy academic schedules to return home for the competition.

Highlighted is a 1995 Prize-winning Chocolate Raspberry Cake that the LaBrecque sisters agreed to share with the readers. ♦

LaBrecque - Chocolate Raspberry Cake

1995 Virginia State Fair - Hershey's Chocolate Cake Contest, First Place



Tips:

You won't need a large piece of this cake to enjoy the full flavor and texture. We make our own Black Raspberry Jam but there are a couple of good brands available from the grocers that work just fine.