

Local baker savours the sweet smell of success ? and creativity



By Brock Weir

As a child, Antonella Cellini wanted few things more than a simple chocolate cake and a birthday party with all her friends.

Growing up in a large Italian family, however, that was a surprisingly tall order.

Instead of her friends and classmates, her aunts and uncles converged and their favourite, black forest cake, was the order of the day. Case closed.

Now CEO of Aurora's wildly successful Artsy Baker, just about every day is a party as she and her fellow artists dream up new, inventive, and wholly original cake designs for all occasions ranging from small parties to high profile public gatherings.

?Body parts are always interesting,? says Antonella with a laugh from her vividly decorated showroom on Industrial Parkway South. ?I don't know if that is more fun, or if I am just going, ?Jeez, I can't believe this! the whole time.?

On a recent visit to their workshop, bakers had many unique cakes on the go ? ranging from corporate cakes celebrating the anniversary of a local private school, to a fondant sculpture of Linda Blair in The Exorcist, with her head mid-spin, soon to be assembled into a specially ordered cake for a film producer. Their showroom is also testament to recent high-profile commissions, from an intricate multi-part cake commissioned by Cirque du Soleil for the recent Toronto opening of their new show Kurios, to a cheerful military confection created for the Duke of York's visit to the Queen's York Rangers last spring.

?I feel blessed to be able to work alongside people who organize all these great events, and I feel blessed having a team where we're actually able to create together to make these events happen,? says Ms. Cellini. ?The great thing is it is nice to work alongside individuals who have the same creative ideas and tactics and we all just make it happen. We kind of work on a whim and we end up putting our minds together to create something. A lot of the time we don't even know what we are creating until it is done.?

But, there are limits to just how far Ms. Cellini is willing to go for the sake of creativity. She has broken her vow to never bake a black forest cake again just once, but vows never to do it again.

?I just don't think there is any need for it! she says of the beleaguered dessert, with a wave of the hand. ?It has horrified and traumatized me all these years! Art was always kind of shunned upon when I was growing up. You had to get yourself a real job.?

This very real job started out of her concerted efforts to buck the family trend.

?Every year I said, ?I swear, when I have my own kids, they can get any cake they wanted,? she says. ?Fast forward a few years and my sister asked if I could bake a cake for my niece's birthday. I made her a 3-D roller skate not thinking it was a big deal, but everybody oohed and aahed, and I thought, ?these people are a bit weird!?

Evidently there were more weirdos out there because the cake orders soon began rolling in, to the point where her husband encouraged her to charge at least enough to cover her materials. Business continued to boom to the extent they renovated their home to accommodate a bakery before moving to their larger premises on Industrial Parkway.

While turning out the cakes, however, Ms. Cellini became frustrated with some of the materials she was often forced to use, particularly prepared fondant which can make ? and often break ? a cake. So, she set to work developing her own fondant that was not only easy to use, but tasty to boot. After pounding the pavement, she eventually connected with Metro which began carrying her product locally. Now it can be found from coast to coast.

?I wanted something that was great tasting, that not only looked nice, but as there are so many kids with food sensitivities, I wanted to get a product that contained no nuts, no gluten, dairy, eggs, trans fats, cholesterol or dyes,? she explains. ?I guess I am just too busy to stop and think about what [this success] feels like. I feel blessed that people like what I have created and that people believe in it. I am just too busy thinking about going forward.?

As employees continue to make the popular fondant on Industrial Parkway, creativity with the cakes is still where her passion lies. There are few things she enjoys more, she says, than sitting down with clients, young and old, to make their dreams come true.

There are those creative body parts, piñata cakes, and even ?divorce cakes?, which are essentially wedding cakes looking bruised, bloodied, and otherwise put through the wringer, but it is one-on-one interaction which really appeals to her.

?I think my favourite cakes are the ones where we will not only have consultations with adults, but with the kids themselves,? she says. ?Some kids are fortunate enough to have parents that allow them to design their own cake. We had one child who created her own animal in her imagination and it was part seal, part whale, and part cow. We sat with the little girl, she told me what she wanted, did a little drawing, and that's what we did. It is such a blessing to be able to just see smiles on kids' faces. [Now] I am able to create these cakes and be part of lasting memories for other families.?

There are also plenty of smiles to go around at home.

?They think options are endless and we can conquer the world together,? she says of her ?backbone? of her husband and kids, who she describes as her best friends. ?I just believe in what they say and move forward.?

