

CELEBRATE: SPECIAL OCCASIONS

STORY BY JENNIFER STREISAND PHOTOS PROVIDED

Cakes with something to say.



“I love creating designs on wedding cakes,” says Natasha Vasili, cake decorator at the Marsh Supermarket in West Lafayette. Realizing that planning a wedding can become another stressful event among the many faced every day, Vasili wants the cake to be the sweet part. “I want customers to leave the store without worrying about the cake,” she says.

In the background standing tall is her latest creation: a gorgeous yellow and white butter cream wedding cake, decorated with white pearls and a lace ruffle on the bottom. Vasili has been a cake decorator at Marsh for 16 years.

She says cake decorating is a highly creative endeavor, but there is fashion, too. For example, there are typically three types of wedding cakes: traditional, modern and vintage. Right now, vintage is in fashion.

“You have to make sure everything is professionally done,” says Vasili. In order to do her best and most creative work, she spends about two hours in the morning preparing ingredients, including the icing—butter cream being the most requested—and making sure the colors coordinate. “Preparation is a very important part of my day,”

she says.

As she begins to decorate a cake, it seems as natural to her as applying lipstick. “I am doing roses, and a mixture of five petals and little daisies.” Vasili sketches what she is going to create before she actually does the decorating.

Vasili meets with the customers at the Marsh in front of the deli/bakery counter so that she is fully able to see and hear what they want in a cake.

And the look of the cake can be as important as the interior design of a living room.

“People have a vision of what they want on the cake, so you have to make sure it looks nice and actually looks like what they want,” says Shelby Chaffee, a cake decorator at Baker’s Peak Bakery & Café in West Lafayette. As a decorator, it’s important to pay close attention to what the customer is requesting, and resist the temptation to design it how the decorator sees it, she says.

Chaffee has worked at Baker’s Peak as a cake decorator for about six months. Her mother, Pamela Miller, owns the business and recruited her to decorate cakes in the bakery because

Above: Fondant figures on a graduation cake from Something Blue bakery in Lafayette. Below: Decorated birthday cake from Marsh Supermarket in West Lafayette.





Left: Wedding cake designed by Baker's Peak in West Lafayette.

Below: This cake from Marsh celebrates a champion season.

of Chaffee's artistic background and interest.

There is no formula to decorating cakes because each one is as different as the customers who request them, says Amanda Treadway, who works with Chaffee as a decorator at Baker's Peak.

"Every cake I do is special," Treadway says. "That cake and those decorations are special to each person and each occasion."

Chaffee works on what she calls an Italian cream cake, composed of almond cake, coconut and pecans. She spreads the white butter cream frosting over the cake with a wet

spatula, taking meticulous care to make sure it's smooth all over, including the sides and the corners. She evens out the sides of this rectangular cake with a knife. Having a smooth surface makes writing on the cake easier, she says.

"Our butter cream frosting is

smooth and perfect," says Miller about her cakes. In addition to owning the business, Miller does the baking along with Deandra Pritchett, the fourth woman who works at Baker's Peak.

Although Chaffee says she always tries to carry out the customer's vision of what they want, it's evident as she makes a swirl-like border with the white butter cream frosting, that the job is a good outlet for her artistic expression and a joyful task.

At Baker's Peak, all of the designs on the cakes are done from scratch, conceived as original designs, and then drawn from there.

"I think Pam appreciates the beauty of the old style, old fashioned and actually artistic, beautiful cakes," says Treadway.

For a non-dairy alternative to butter cream frosting, try a whipped frosting. "The whipped icing is more like a whipped topping," says Heather Huey, bakery manager and head cake decorator at the Pay Less store on Maple Point Drive in Lafayette. "The whipped topping is not as sweet, and it is not as thick as the traditional butter cream."

Huey does many cakes at Pay Less using a scanner, which lays a photograph of the customer's choice directly on the cake in an edible image.

"We actually use the picture on the »



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Marsh specializes in cakes for every occasion.

cake,” says Huey. “We scan it, and it goes into a scanner, and we have an edible ink, and it prints out on a piece of sugar paper that just soaks into the icing,” she explains. Huey says this technology is especially handy for graduation cakes because a lot of people request decorations using senior pictures.

For people who want to decorate their own cakes, Huey recommends using a frozen cake because it is easier to manipulate and do the design. Then you can always decorate your own cake, with some assistance from the store.

“A lot of people will come in and ask for us to ice the cake and trim it, and then they take it home, and put their own decorations on it. That is a popular choice because the customer feels like they have put the effort into making a cake,” she says.

Specialty cakes and designs are what Something Blue Bakery—a new business in Lafayette—specializes in creating for its customers. Makenzie Kus is the owner of the shop on Main Street, and she also works as a cake decorator, bringing to fruition designs that range from the traditional to the bizarre.

“We can create anything that anyone wants,” says Kus. For wedding cakes, Something Blue can create a cake with a decorative pattern that exactly matches the bride’s dress.

“I did a cake a while back: The bride had a very beautiful lace dress that had a beautiful satin ribbon around the waist, so we created all of this lacework on the cake. Her wedding flowers were hydrangeas, so we had many hydrangeas, sugar flowers, going down the sides, and on the top of the cake.”

So when it comes to celebrations, it’s not just “the icing on the cake,” because cake decorations convey love and mark the passage of time during our lives.

“For generations, people have met around the table for special events,” says Randy Winchester, store general manager for the Marsh in West Lafayette, “and we become part of their celebration.”

“I just think that cake is one of those things that bring people together,” says Kus of Something Blue Bakery. “Even if it’s for a goodbye party, you are remembering that person, and you are celebrating that they are moving on to the next event in their life. You rarely find somebody that doesn’t like cake.” ❧



Something Blue bakery created this elegant wedding cake and fun grooms cake for a recent wedding. (Photos by Ed Lausch Photography)