

CAROLINA CAKES

In the pages that follow, you will see cakes that nobody else has ever made, cakes that only a North Carolinian can appreciate. We asked our recipe developer, Wendy Perry, to create five quintessential North Carolina cakes. So she rounded up a few of our food traditions — Krispy Kreme, country ham, pimento cheese, Nabs, and Pepsi — and created five new cakes with that old Carolina soul.

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GRAFF

RECIPES DEVELOPED AND TESTED BY WENDY PERRY AND TERESA WILLIFORD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT HULSMAN | STYLING BY MATT HULSMAN AND DEANNE O'CONNOR





THE KRISPY KREME CAKE



KRISPY KREME

Here they come.

They arrive in the grease in groups of three.

They move slowly, and they are delicate. But they band together like an army, and they have 80 years of history, back to their origins in Winston-Salem in 1937, forging them together as one strong Southern unit.

They take grease on one side and then flip to the other. They move to a conveyor belt at a deliberate pace, with reinforcements emerging every second from the grease behind them.

Three more.
Three more.
Three more.
Three more.

They approach a wall of liquid sugar, white hot. It takes four full seconds for the sugar to shower each row of three from front to back. They don't rush.

They emerge on the other side complete. They flop down a level on the conveyor belt — four more seconds from front flop to back flop.

They follow the turn around the bend, posing for customers waiting to make an order. Individually, they are 99 cents apiece. In a unit of a dozen, they are \$6.99 total — they belong in a group. They keep coming around, all morning long.

Three more.
Three more.
Three more.
Three more.
Hot now.

KRISPY KREME CAKE

- 2 cups Midstate Mills Southern Biscuit all-purpose flour
 - 2 teaspoons baking powder
 - 1 teaspoon baking soda
 - ½ teaspoon salt
 - 1 cup buttermilk
 - 1 cup applesauce, freshly made with North Carolina apples*
 - ½ cup vegetable oil
 - 1 tablespoon finely ground Larry's Beans mocha coffee beans
 - 2 teaspoons Yah's Best gourmet vanilla extract
 - 16 ounces Escazú chocolate 64% cocoa
 - 2 large eggs
 - 2 large egg whites
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 6-12* Krispy Kreme original glazed doughnuts, torn into 4 chunks (let doughnuts air-dry several hours)
- powdered sugar

CAKE

1. Preheat oven to 325°. Spray Bundt cake pan with nonstick spray.
2. Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In another bowl, whisk buttermilk with applesauce, oil, coffee granules, and vanilla.
3. Melt chocolate in microwave in 10-second intervals, stirring each time, until melted. Cool slightly.
4. Beat eggs and egg whites with stand mixer on low speed. Gradually add sugar. Increase mixer speed to high, and continue beating until mixture is thick

and pale, about 5 minutes. **5.** Pour in chocolate, and mix on low until incorporated. **6.** With spatula, alternately fold dry ingredients and buttermilk mixture into egg mixture, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients.

ASSEMBLY

1. Spoon a layer of batter into pan to cover the bottom (which will become the top when inverting onto cake plate). Arrange pieces of torn doughnuts over the batter. Spoon batter over doughnut pieces and repeat batter/doughnut layers until pan is full. **2.** Bake 45-60 minutes or until cake springs back when lightly touched. **3.** Let cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto rack. Cool completely. **4.** Just before serving, dust cake with powdered sugar.

NOTES

The number of doughnuts depends on size and shape of pan. For best results, use a Bundt pan with wider tube.

Fresh doughnuts will "melt" into cake. Be sure to allow doughnuts to air-dry several hours or overnight to prevent them from disappearing in the cake.

*For applesauce, use 4 cooking apples, 2 tablespoons water or apple juice, and 2 tablespoons sugar or honey. Peel, core, and chop apples. Place in microwave-safe bowl. Sprinkle with water. Cover tightly, and cook on high about 6 minutes or until apples are tender. Add sugar, and mash with potato masher until desired consistency. (If the apples are naturally sweet, you can omit adding sugar.)

Several years ago, a sweet man from

North Carolina stood at the doorstep of a chocolate factory in Costa Rica and begged for help finding a special field of beans.

Hallot Parson III, an Apex native and an accomplished chef, had only one piece of information when he started his quest to find real chocolate beans — a man named Hugo had a field, and Hugo recently started to grow organic cacao beans. His crop

wasn't ready yet, but Parson wanted to be the first to find him.

Hugo was elusive. Every person Parson asked, "Where's Hugo?" deflected the question. Finally, Parson went to the Nestlé factory. The security guard wouldn't let him in, but he did give Parson Hugo's address.

A few years later, Parson brought some of Hugo's beans back to North Carolina and went to work upstairs in

OTHER NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCTS USED



Midstate Mills flour
midstatemills.com



North Carolina Apples
enjoyncapples.com



Larry's Beans Coffee
larrysbeans.com



Yah's Best Vanilla Extract
yahsbest.com

a wine shop he managed in Beaufort. Soon, he became one of the first bean-to-bar chocolate-makers in the South. Parson's Escazú Chocolates is now an artisan chocolate-making shop and store in Raleigh.

One of the things North Carolinians are proud of is that we can grow most of what we eat, meat or plant. But cacao beans need average temperatures of more than 70 degrees throughout the year.

We can't make chocolate from scratch.

But one of the other things we're proud of is this: If we can't do it, we probably know a guy who knows a guy who can.

Parson became our chocolate guy.

After being raised in Apex, he moved to Dallas, Texas, and later Aspen, Colorado, where he was a chef at a resort. Eventually, he moved back to North Carolina to become the chef at a restaurant in Beaufort. Not long

after he moved here, the restaurant's owners sold the building. But they still had a wine store, Cru Wine Bar and Wine Store, and they put Parson in charge of it.

The owners also had an interest in chocolate and a second home in Costa Rica. They flew Parson down in 2005, and he started scouting the area. Storms and flooding had ruined Costa Rica's cacao crops several years ago, but Parson learned about Hugo. Parson had only a first name for him, and he went all around saying it — "Where's Hugo?" — until he finally found him. They liked each other, and they sparked a friendship that continues today.

When Parson got to know Hugo, this farmer living in the Caribbean, Parson finally learned Hugo's last name. It's Hermelink.

So, as it turns out, after all that searching, this sweet man from North Carolina was able to bring home the beans to make our state's first authentic, Central American-grown chocolate only after he searched all over Costa Rica for a farmer named Hugo, who, as it turns out, is Dutch. ■



Escazú Chocolates
936 North Blount Street
Raleigh, N.C. 27604
(919) 832-3433



THE MAPLE SYRUP & COUNTRY HAM CAKE



MAPLE SYRUP & COUNTRY HAM CAKE

CAKE

- 1 24-ounce bag Midstate Mills Tenda-Bake Maple Burst pancake mix
- 2½-3 cups buttermilk
- ¼ cup sifted cocoa

HAM and REDEYE GRAVY

- 2 heaping cups Phillips Brothers country ham trimmings
- 1 cup Larry's Beans espresso coffee, brewed strong

FROSTING

- 1 cup vegetable shortening
- ¼ cup butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 3 tablespoons light corn syrup
- ¼ cups cooked Phillips Brothers country ham trimmings

REDEYE GRAVY DRIZZLE

- 1½ cups sifted powdered sugar
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons Appalachian maple syrup
- ½ cup redeye gravy
- ¼ cup Carolina Nut Cracker pecan pieces, toasted and chopped

CAKE

1. In large bowl, stir together pancake mix, buttermilk and cocoa.
2. Cook pancakes in skillet according to package directions, making large-size cake layers about 8 inches in diameter. Let cool.

HAM AND REDEYE GRAVY

1. Heat skillet on medium-high heat. Add country ham pieces with about 1 cup water to hot pan, and cook until water evaporates.
2. Once evaporated, continue cooking ham bits until crispy, about 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently.
3. Remove ham with slotted spoon, and set aside.
4. Add 1 cup strong coffee to ham drippings, and stir with whisk to scrape up any bits to make redeye gravy.
5. Bring to a boil, and cook several minutes to reduce by half.
6. Strain through coffee filter to remove dark bits, and cool.

FROSTING

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer on medium speed, cream shortening and butter. Add almond extract.
2. Gradually mix in sugar, 1 cup at a time, scraping sides and bottom of bowl several times.
3. Add milk and syrup, and continue to beat on medium speed until light and fluffy.
4. With spatula, fold ¼ cups country ham bits into frosting.
5. Spread between pancake layers and on top, letting some drip down sides of cake.

DRIZZLE

1. Put all drizzle ingredients except pecans into a microwave-safe bowl.
2. Heat in 30-second intervals, stirring after each, until blended and pourable.
3. Cool slightly; drizzle over top of frosted cake.
4. Scatter toasted pecan pieces and remaining ham on top of cake.

If you wake up today and want a whole country ham for dinner tonight, you'd better talk to your yesterday self and give him what for. Because it doesn't work like that.

Country ham requires planning. Country ham requires patience. Country ham requires that you — now hang on for this — order ahead. Country ham is something you wait for.

This isn't like in a doctor's office, not like watching a close basketball game that's going down to the wire, not like any of those awful waits where you have to wonder, "What's going to happen when I'm done waiting?" No, this is a wait with the same old outcome, every time. And, yes, it sure is salty.

In the 1940s, Talmadge Phillips came back home to Randolph County after fighting in World War II with the United States Navy. Twenty-one years old, a veteran, and needing work. He met a man in Asheboro named Earl Cummings. Mr. Cummings had a shop where he wrapped meat and quick-froze it and sold it. Mr. Cummings hired Phillips as his first employee. Phillips worked and waited.

In 1962, Mr. Cummings got sick and sold the business to Phillips. Phillips changed the name to Phillips Brothers Country Ham. They did hams the right way, the country way, the long way, and people loved it.

Then grocery stores became bigger, and customers bought their hams there, country or not. Some folks lost the taste for that salt altogether. They eat city ham.

That salt is what makes it, though. That salt is the traditional cure.

Phillips Brothers buys its hams from eastern North Carolina farms, puts the hams in a cooler for about 45 days, dries them, then covers them in that salt and hangs them for about 120 days.



APPALACHIAN MAPLE SYRUP AT PIERCE FRUIT AND PRODUCE

Ken Pierce, who runs Pierce Fruit and Produce out of the State Farmers Market in Raleigh, has someone for everything. For barbecue sauce, for instance, he has George's in Nashville, Grendeddy Dave's in Wake Forest, Mel's in Raleigh, and many others.

Pierce sells just about everything, and he remembers just about every name. His maple syrup comes from one of two people — Sam Ritter out of Charlotte or Lynda Justice out of Flat Rock. Both regularly take their maple syrup straight from the North Carolina mountains and send it to Pierce to sell.

Pierce Fruit and Produce

1225 Farmers Market Drive
Raleigh, N.C. 27603
(919) 834-0446

OTHER NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCTS USED



Midstate Mills
Tenda-Bake
Maple Burst
Pancake Mix
midstatemills.com



Carolina Nut Cracker Pecans
carolinanutcracker.com

That's why it's ours, this country ham.

"To get a good ham with more flavor," says Dianne Phillips Craven, who runs the business now, "it needs to stay in that curing stage."

The Phillips Brothers process is a little faster than the real old-fashioned way. Throughout our state, people have ugly, old shacks with ugly, old, moldy hams that hang for a year before they're ready to eat. One whole year between killing and eating. People might call Southerners slow. But in all that time Southerners spend doing things the long way, they find peace in patience, an accord between time and wants, an awareness that we can't have everything we desire right now.

Why'd we ever think of such a thing as putting salt on ham to keep it? Because it's hot down here. We haven't always had refrigeration. That salt extracts water, which doesn't allow for microbes to grow, and that was the way to cure a ham before refrigeration. That salt thwarted that Southern heat.

That's why it's ours, this country ham.

Dianne is Talmadge's daughter. Talmadge is still living, 85 years old, and he still helps with the sausage-making part of the business. Dianne and her husband run Phillips Brothers Country Ham with their son. They sell mostly sliced meat now, and business isn't easy because the cost of government regulations keeps rising. It's harder and harder to sell pork that meets the standards of code.

But people are starting to return to this down-home shop in Asheboro. They left for the grocery store for years, and Phillips Brothers waited. And now, all of a sudden, people want to know where their meat comes from again.

"They say what goes around comes around," Dianne says.

Yes, they sure do say that, don't they? ■

Phillips Brothers

1523 South Fayetteville Street
Asheboro, N.C. 27205
(336) 625-4322



THE PIMENTO CHEESE CAKE



SAVORY SPICE SHOP

Most new customers who walk into Savory Spice Shop in Raleigh ask owners Bob and Cindy Jones the same question. “Does your house smell like this?” “No,” Cindy says. “But our pantry does.”

For any recipe, they have a spice, and for every spice, there is a scent. Savory Spice Shop has 400 spices and herbs on the shelves, and 140 of them are proprietary blends. The Joneses take customers’ recipes and measure out specific amounts. Or, they just let customers sample.

Home cooks these days want to know where their meat and vegetables come from, and now, they can even know where their spices come from.

They’re fresh, gluten-free, and ground weekly.

Savory Spice Shop started as one store in Denver, Colorado, in 2004. The owners decided to expand in October 2010, and when they looked to open their first shop on the East Coast, they chose Raleigh. The Joneses applied, and they were awarded the Raleigh market. They’re already looking to expand, and other Savory Spice Shops have opened in Greensboro and Charlotte.

And if customers want that sample, great. But if they pour too much into their hands, the Joneses ask that they just drop it on the floor. It adds to that smell.

Savory Spice Shop
8470 Honeycutt Road, Suite 108
Raleigh, N.C. 27615
(919) 900-8291

PIMENTO CHEESE & CORNBREAD CAKE

CAKE LAYERS

- ¾ cup House-Autry yellow, self-rising cornmeal
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup melted butter
- 2 tablespoons Cloister honey
- 4 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 cups grated Colby-Jack blend
- 1 jalapeño, finely diced
- 1 tablespoon Savory Spice Shop cheddar cheese powder

FROSTING

- 2 (8-ounce) blocks cream cheese
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons Savory Spice Shop dill dip mix
- 1 tablespoon Savory Spice Shop dried green onion flakes
- 1 tablespoon Savory Spice Shop chopped garlic flakes
- 1 pinch salt

FILLING AND GARNISH

- ¼ cup Cloister Arbol Chili Pepper Infused Honey
- 2 (10-ounce) packs MyThreeSons Pimento Cheese, divided

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray a 12-inch x 9-inch pan with nonstick baking spray.

CAKE

1. Sift together cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a mixing bowl. Add oil, butter, honey, eggs, milks, cheese, jalapeño, and cheese powder; stir to combine. **2.** Pour batter into prepared pan, and bake in preheated oven for 30-40 minutes, or until lightly browned. Remove from oven, and let cool for 10 minutes in baking pan. **3.** Turn out on wire rack, and cool completely.

FROSTING

Combine all ingredients in medium bowl, and mix well.

TO ASSEMBLE CAKE

1. Cut cake crosswise into 3 equal pieces. Place first layer onto plate. **2.** Warm pepper-infused honey, and brush onto first layer. **3.** Frost layer with cream cheese mixture; spread layer of pimento cheese over frosting. Repeat honey, frosting, and pimento cheese on second layer. **4.** Place third layer on top, and brush with honey. **5.** Cover top and sides of cake with remaining cream cheese frosting. **6.** Garnish with piped pimento cheese.

It seems like it should be a fundamental quality of anything with cheese in its name: If you make something called cheese and sell it as a cheese product with cheese on the label, then, without question, the most prominent ingredient in your cheese, the thing that gives it its name — cheese — should not be mayonnaise.

Where did we go wrong with pimento cheese? It’s one of our foods, Southern and social, but the varieties in the grocery store are more business-driven than homespun, and business minds know one thing: Mayonnaise is cheaper than cheese. So companies thin the product, mayonnaise becomes the top ingredient, and pimento cheese loses its identity as, well, cheese.

Cheryl Barnett had a best friend when she was growing up in Alabama, and that best friend had a mom named Emmy who made the best homemade pimento cheese. Emmy kept a tub of the cheese in the fridge at all times.

After high school and college, Barnett came to North Carolina in 1988 and went to dental school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to become an orthodontist. Her grandfather was a dentist, and she had the same perfectionist

OTHER NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCTS USED



House-Autry Mills Cornmeal
house-autry.com



Reliable Cheese Company
reliablecheese.com



Cloister Honey
cloisterhoney.com

personality. “We like straight teeth and everything lined up in a row,” Barnett says.

She launched a career in Greensboro and started a family with three sons — Michael, John, and William.

Barnett tried to eat store-bought pimento cheese when she moved here, so far away from Emmy’s fridge. But she couldn’t stand it. So she called and asked Emmy for her recipe, the one she grew up on. Barnett began making it in her home, at night, after fixing people’s teeth.

Barnett worked for 14 years as an orthodontist before back pain forced her into early retirement. It broke her heart to quit her career. She made pimento cheese to cope.

This pimento cheese is real, packed with extra-sharp

Vermont cheddar, aged nine months, and all-natural mayonnaise. This cheese melts.

She gained state permits to sell her pimento cheese and had her kitchen inspected. She called both farmers markets in Greensboro, but neither one had a space for her. Then she gave a taste to executives at The Fresh Market. They loved it. They began stocking their shelves with it in October 2010.

Within a year, MyThreeSons pimento cheese was on sale at several Lowe’s Foods and Whole Foods in the Triad and Triangle. Most recently, Harris Teeter added Barnett’s pimento cheese to all 207 stores in eight states. In 14 months, Barnett’s cheese has spread across the South. Real sells.

Here’s one more thing about Barnett: When she was in dental school in 1989, she became the mascot for the UNC basketball team. So the savior of our Southern cheese is a woman from Alabama who became a Tar Heel, a retired orthodontist who became a mother of three, and a start-up cook who became a businesswoman by making pimento cheese, real pimento cheese — the cheese that reminds her of who she’s always been. ■



MyThreeSons Gourmet
2007 Yanceyville Street
Greensboro, N.C. 27405
(336) 324-5638



THE NABS CAKE



NABS

If Phillip Lance hadn't loaned a customer money in the early 1900s, that man wouldn't have paid Lance back in peanuts, and Lance wouldn't have turned those peanuts into peanut butter, and his wife and daughter wouldn't have suggested spreading that peanut butter in between two crackers, and local mill workers wouldn't have had such a perfect snack to get them through the day, and generations of grandfathers would have had to find a different treat to give their grandkids, and drivers would be a little hungrier, and breast pockets all across North Carolina would crackle less.

Without Nabs, we wouldn't be empty, but we wouldn't be nearly as full.

The Toastchee brand of Lance crackers, in particular, is a part of the Carolinas' culture. It became popular in the 1920s and '30s, when Charlotte was a textile center. "The packaged crackers were a godsend for people who had to be in a loom room all day," says Dr. Tom Hanchett, the staff historian of the Levine Museum of the New South.

Around the same time as Lance's rise, Nabisco opened a regional bakery in Charlotte and started producing packaged crackers. With two versions of the same item, people began to adopt the shorter nickname, Nabs.

There are dozens of varieties of snack crackers all over the country now, but here in the Carolinas, the Lance Toastchee is ours. And we call it Nabs. And we don't know where we'd be without it.

NABS CAKE

CAKE LAYERS

- 1¼ sticks butter, softened
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 1¾ ounces French vanilla instant pudding mix
- 4 eggs
- 1¾ cups milk
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon Yah's Best gourmet vanilla extract
- 3 cups self-rising flour, sifted
- 1½ cups hoop cheese, grated
- 6 packs Lance Toastchee crackers

FROSTING

- 1 cup solid vegetable shortening
 - ¼ cup butter, softened
 - 1 teaspoon almond extract
 - 4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
 - 2 tablespoons milk
 - 3 tablespoons light corn syrup
- peanut butter (see recipe)

PEANUT BUTTER

- 2 cups Bakers' peanuts, lightly roasted
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- ½ teaspoon salt

NAB CRUMB GARNISH

- 12 packs Lance Toastchee crackers

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray three 8-inch-square baking pans.

CAKE

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer on medium speed, cream butter until fluffy. In separate bowl, combine sugar and pudding mix and slowly add to butter. Continue to cream

on medium speed for 6-8 minutes. 2. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. 3. Combine milk, oil, and extract. Alternating on low speed, add flour to butter mixture, beginning and ending with flour. Stop occasionally to scrape down bowl. 4. Gently fold in cheese by hand with spatula. 5. Divide batter equally between baking pans. Bake for 25-35 minutes until done. 6. Cool in pans for 10 minutes. Invert cakes onto cooling racks to cool completely.

PEANUT BUTTER

Put peanuts in food processor, and pulse until fine. Add oil and salt. Continue to pulse to make creamy peanut butter.

FROSTING

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer on medium speed, cream shortening and butter. 2. Add almond extract. 3. Gradually mix in sugar, one cup at a time, scraping sides and bottom of bowl several times. 4. Add milk and syrup, and continue to beat on medium speed until light and fluffy. 5. Blend in peanut butter.

NAB CRUMB GARNISH

Open crackers, and remove peanut-butter filling. Crumble crackers into fine pieces.

ASSEMBLY

1. Place bottom layer on cake plate. Spread frosting on top of layer. 2. Lay crackers (four rows of four whole crackers) across, and press gently into the frosting. 3. Lightly spread more frosting across top of crackers, and top with second cake layer. 4. Repeat frosting-crackers-frosting layering. Top with third cake layer. 5. Frost top and sides of cake. 6. Sprinkle cracker crumbs evenly over top and sides of cake. Press into frosting.



The little girl had a hitch in her speech, and no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't say, "Grandma." So she called her grandmother Yah.

The little girl had a littler sister, and the two little girls had happy, young parents. They went to church one rainy Sunday morning 14 years ago, this little family, and they were on their way back to their Charlotte home when their Toyota Camry hydroplaned, spun, and hit a van. The parents — Dad at 26 and Mom at 25 — died instantly. The little girls, 3 years old and 11 months old, were unharmed.

This is how Yah saved her family.

Suzanne McCord Crawford thought she had finished raising kids when her cell phone rang on October 26, 1997. She had two children, and her oldest

OTHER NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCTS USED



Midstate Mills
Flour
midstate
mills.com



Bakers' Peanuts
bakers
peanuts.com



Reliable Cheese
Company
reliable
cheese.com

We used just one little teaspoon of Yah's Best's vanilla extract in our Nabs Cake. We couldn't have made it without it.

was Jason. He was successful in the home construction field, installing granite and marble surfaces. Jason had a wife named Heather, and they had two little girls.

Suzanne had been a nurse for nearly 20 years. She was divorced, and by 1997, she had cut back on her nursing hours to slow down. She did private nursing and opened a bed and breakfast. She lived on land near Huntersville, land her grandfather first bought in 1895.

That Sunday, Suzanne had been away at the beach with a girlfriend, and she was on her way home.

The phone rang when she was still five hours away. Jason and Heather were dead; the two little girls survived.

Suzanne went straight to the hospital, and she started doing things without thinking, things she needed to do because nobody else could. She took care of the formal paperwork and organ-donation matters. "And then I just wrapped the babies up and took them home with me," Suzanne says.

Yah had those little girls from that day forward. Yah became their mother. Yah raised them in that home by herself, with the help of her surviving daughter, Paige. Paige had recently graduated from North Carolina State University when her brother and sister-in-law died. Paige was on her way to medical school, but she decided not to pursue that dream because the timing was no longer right: She couldn't spend another eight years off in school when her mom and those two little girls needed some help.

We make sense of the world by breaking it into groups, narrower and narrower — from something as wide as being members of God's kingdom to something as small

as being members of one church. We find ourselves, as individuals, among others who are like us. The smallest unit will always be family.

And within every little family is an ordinary person who's a hero to somebody.

Three years after Jason and Heather died, Suzanne knew she needed to find ways to make extra money. She and Paige began selling homemade salsa at the farmers market in Huntersville.

Suzanne first served that salsa at a family party in 1995. A picture from that day shows Heather with her oldest daughter on her lap. Jason is in the chair across from them. The salsa's on a little table in the middle.

Suzanne took seven jars to the farmers market that first weekend, and all of them sold. The next weekend, she took 14. All of them sold.

Suzanne is now 67 years old. And she and Paige run a business that includes more than 80 products — salsas, seasonings, dressings, flavorings — and those products are in specialty stores and restaurants all around North Carolina.

The business is called Yah's Best Products. We used just one little teaspoon of Yah's Best's vanilla extract in our Nabs Cake. We couldn't have made the cake without it.

The two little girls, by the way, they're growing fast.

The older one, who gave Suzanne the nickname Yah, is now 17 years old and a senior in high school. Her name is Molly, and she's just like her mother — quiet, private, organized, and committed. Molly is applying to colleges. She wants to work in forensics.

The younger one, less than a year old when her parents died, is now 15 and a sophomore in high school. Her name is Claire, and she's just like her father — funny, personable, a social star. Claire wants to be on Broadway.

They have big dreams. But their grandmother has made something clear to them: If for any reason those dreams don't come true, those two little girls always have a great, little company named Yah's to fall back on. ■

Yah's Best Products
Huntersville, N.C.
yahsbest.com
(704) 947-0011



THE PEPSI 'N' PEANUTS CAKE



PEPSI 'N' PEANUTS MOLTEN CAKES (MADE WITH GLUTEN-FREE PRODUCTS)

Makes 8 (4-inch) cakes

CAKE

- 8 (4-inch) ramekins (or 4 small springform pans)
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup applesauce, made with N.C. mountain apples*
- ¼ cups peanut butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cups High Rock Farm Chestnut Flour
- ¼ cups gluten-free all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 1 pinch salt
- ½ cups milk

REDUCTION

- 1 (16-ounce) Pepsi

FILLING 1

- 8 ounces Escazú chocolate 64% cocoa, chopped
- 6 tablespoons Pepsi reduction

FILLING 2

- ¼ cup peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons Pepsi reduction

WHIPPED TOPPING

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon Yah's Best vanilla extract

GARNISH

- ¼ cup chopped Baker's peanuts
- Pepsi reduction

CAKE

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Spray ramekins with nonstick baking spray.
2. In large bowl, mix brown sugar, oil, applesauce, and peanut butter until fluffy.
3. Beat in

eggs one at a time; stir in vanilla.

4. Combine flours, baking soda, cream of tartar, and salt.
5. Mix into peanut butter mixture, alternating with milk. Set aside.

PEPSI REDUCTION

In heavy saucepan, on medium heat, reduce Pepsi until about half of original volume and thickened. Set aside.

FILLING 1

In small, microwave-safe bowl, warm chocolate and Pepsi reduction in 20-30 second intervals, stirring after each, until melted together.

FILLING 2

Combine all ingredients in small, microwave-safe bowl, and warm for about 15 seconds. Stir to combine, and cream.

WHIPPED TOPPING

1. Beat whipping cream until soft peaks form.
2. While mixer is running, slowly add sugar and vanilla.
3. Whip until hard peaks form.

TO BAKE CAKES

1. Fill each ramekin half full with peanut butter cake mixture.
2. Put 2 teaspoons of each filling on top of each cake mixture.
3. Top with more batter until ramekin is almost full.
4. Bake at 400° for 15-20 minutes. Tops will crack slightly.
5. Remove from oven, and run a knife around cakes to loosen.
6. Let cool for 5 minutes. Invert onto serving plates. (If using springform pans, slide onto serving plates.)
7. Top with dollop of whipped topping and crumbled peanuts. Drizzle with Pepsi reduction. Best if served warm just after baking.

*For applesauce, use 4 cooking apples, 2 tablespoons water or apple juice, and 2 tablespoons sugar or honey. Peel, core, and chop apples. Place in microwave-safe bowl. Sprinkle with water. Cover tightly, and cook on high about 6 minutes or until apples are tender. (Cooking time will vary depending on type of apple used.) Add sugar, and mash with potato masher until desired consistency. (If the apples are naturally sweet, you can omit adding sugar.)

The first thing you'll notice about the old Southern tradition of putting salted peanuts in Pepsi is that it's not all that easy to get those peanuts in.

The opening at the top of a drink bottle isn't made for inserting or dispensing food. It's a drink bottle. So be careful. Be slow.

And by all means, be sure. As individuals, Pepsi and peanuts stand just fine on their own. We North Carolinians gave birth to Pepsi-Cola in New Bern in 1898. After 114 years, it's proved to be a sweet treat by itself. And we've been growing peanuts in northeastern North Carolina since we first learned to farm. At ballparks and picnics and anywhere, they've proved to be salty snacks that don't need any help.

So be sure. To mix them is to make a commitment, a commitment to a compromise between salt and sweet, a commitment to eating your drink.



OTHER NORTH CAROLINA PRODUCTS USED



“It brings back a lot of memories to people who grew up in the South. **It’s part of who we are.**”

— Cecilia Budd Grimes, author

The next thing you’ll notice is the fizz, a reaction between the two opposites. To the eye it looks violent, but to the ear it resembles the familiar sound of waking up to the snowy screen on an old television in the middle of the night.

The next thing you’ll notice is that time will pass, waiting

for the fizzing to stop. Many North Carolinians will use this time to recall the grandfather who taught them to mix a soft drink and peanuts sitting in front of the old service station. This tradition was born with his generation, and only a few of us carry on with it today.

“It brings back a lot of memories to people who grew up in the South,” says Cecilia Budd Grimes, author of the *What It Means to Be Southern* series. Grimes remembers the tradition mostly with Coca-Cola. “It’s part of who we are.”

One thing that’s true, though, is that it’s not just Southern. Midwesterners consider Pepsi and peanuts a tradition, too. But in the Southwest, they put popcorn in their Pepsi.

We have other combinations that just work. RC Cola and MoonPies come to mind. Why peanuts don’t go into an RC Cola, we don’t question that. They just don’t. They go in Pepsi.

The reality is Pepsi and peanuts lasted only a few decades as a prominent combination. Even Grimes remembers it mostly from watching her grandfather Budd at the service station in Siler City. We don’t see that very often anymore.

North Carolina is changing. People move here from elsewhere now, and we wonder: How will they mix? Will they take to North Carolina’s traditions?

Which brings us to the last thing you’ll notice about the old Southern tradition of putting salted peanuts in Pepsi: After those first few gulps and chews, it’s not all that easy to get those peanuts out. And so they float in that sweet pool of North Carolina’s soft drink, two opposites waiting together as one fine refreshment. 🍷

Michael Graff is the senior editor of Our State magazine. His most recent stories were “Jacksonville’s Heroes” and “Pure Pineburst” (January 2012).

