

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes

New cake
is savory,
not gooey

Lately I've been on the proverbial bandwagon heralding the "lighter" side of food. Everyone talks about getting in shape for summer but I, for one, have no doubt that clothing manufacturers are designing waistbands different this year because, for some odd reason, mine seems to be somewhat lower than my navel.

Now I could continue with what we should and, unfortunately, shouldn't eat but...

a) I've already mowed the lawn three times.

b) I've tilled and planted the garden.

c) I've already planted the flowers around my house.

d) I redid the bathroom (by myself).

I want some cheesecake.

Ah, but before you get all fired up thinking that these pages will be filled with gooey, creamy, New York style varieties of cheesecakes, look again.

Savory cheesecakes are a whole new variety of exclusive cheesecakes that seem to be gaining in popularity in the Detroit area. Perfect for lunch, brunch, casual suppers or buffets, these do-ahead treats combine a creamy taste with a smooth, velvety texture. They take the same form as their sweet counterparts, but the flavorings are a real surprise.

FROM THE EXTERIOR, they look like cheesecakes. Instead of a graham cracker or cookie crust, these crusts are formed by combining toasted breadcrumbs, grated cheese (which helps the crust brown and crisp) and melted butter.

The essential filling remains the same — cheese. Soft and delicate cream cheese is the common denominator in these cases. Fresh cream cheese, which has a slightly tangy flavor and contains no preservatives, is preferred, but the packaged bricks available at the supermarket are acceptable. (Fresh cream cheese can be purchased at specialty food stores and cheese shops.) Cottage cheese and ricotta can be added to lighten the taste and calories.

Other than a mélange of fresh herbs, filling and great cheese, the only other staple really necessary to prepare these delectable goodies is a good quality springform pan. If you have yet to invest in one, it can be purchased at all gourmet and kitchen shops, with the lesser-quality pan coming in at under \$5, to non-stick all-aluminum varieties at well over \$30.

If you're thinking about taking the cheesecake to a function, you might also want to invest in the same-size cardboard-bottom insert. These are about 10 cents each, and you will never have to worry about leaving the bottom of your springform pan in someone's kitchen again.

To my friends: I think I have about eight different-sized bottoms in my cellar. Call me if you want them.

ALL THE RECIPES call for preheating the breadcrumb crust. You have never tasted breadcrumb crust you can use fresh or pre-packed varieties. Sprinkle them on a cookie sheet and toasting them in a moderate (350-degree) oven for 5-10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

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How to be
a winner

Betsy Brethen, Family-Tested Winner Dinner columnist, is looking for tasty summer salad recipes, as well as recipes for barbecuing meat or fish on the grill. If you have a favorite dinner that includes such recipes, why not send it in? Maybe you will be a Winner Dinner Winner. See Brethen's column, Page 3B, for details on how to submit your recipes.

Independence through cooking

See related story, Family-Tested Winner Dinner column, Page 3B.

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

ONE SCHOOL DAY each week, nine students in Sharon Rivera's special class at Berkshire Middle School in Beverly Hills prepare lunch and then share in the dining experience.

The meal, however, provides much more than mere nontime sustenance.

It is a journey into self-sufficiency, an odyssey of cuisine by a handful of special students whose potential for independent living is coaxed into fuller bloom through an experience in cooking.

Reading and math, health, science and language are a part of the experience. Teamwork and cooperation, etiquette and socializing are another.

Home economics and especially cooking, long included in curriculum for mentally impaired and autistic students, is elevated in importance by Rivera because of the basic survival skills it provides.

By preparing a meal and then eating it, "We learn we can do things for ourselves, take care of ourselves. It's a tremendous feeling of independence. It's very exciting," Rivera said. Most of these students, she added, are quite capable and many may one day live on their own.

KATHY, WITH HER mop of blond curls, labors over an apple. She, Darren, an autistic youth; and Marc, who favors the spicy food of his Mexican heritage, are peeling a pot of apples, preparing them for a salad. It is to be served, Darren and Marc have each peeled several but Kathy is having trouble. She has yet to master the peeler.

Rivera glides by the table where the trio works, stopping long enough to again demonstrate the peeler for Kathy.

"Does it matter if we make a mistake?" Rivera asks no one in particular. The question, one in a steady stream of queries meant to provoke thought and motivate action, elicits brief comments.

Rivera then answers herself. "Mistakes are how we learn."

Erin, in spite of a withered arm, is crushing garlic for the salad dressing, laboriously reading a recipe for ingredients and amounts. After some confusion, she draws on former directives: "Do we have everything out? Are we doing this step by step?"

Sarah, a small wispy of a girl, carefully measures green salad into a dozen bowls. Her helpmate, a willowy beauty also named Sara, caps each salad with garbanzo beans, bacon bits and croutons.

Rivera's aide, Marilyn Price, cautions the girls, "You need enough for 12 bowls. Count them out." Later, Sara confides that Price is her "very best friend."

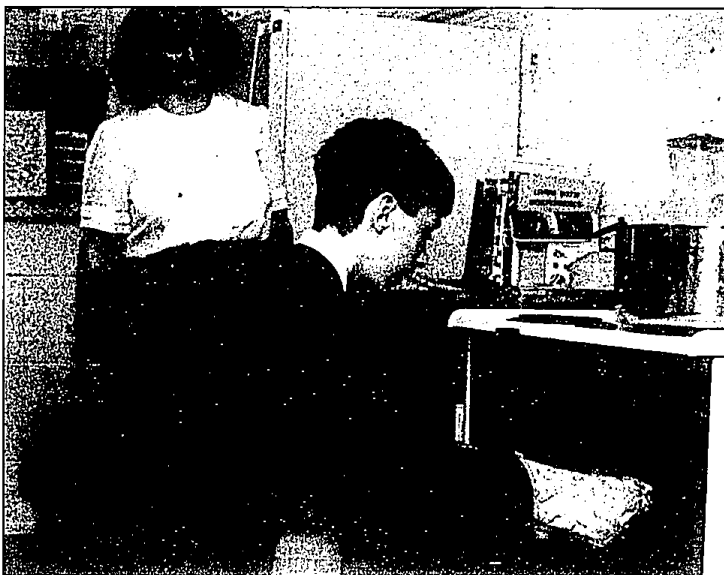
Aaron, who proudly announces he is in eighth grade, and Gauri, of East Indian ancestry, measure water for Kool-Aid. Gauri whispers "I love you" to Rivera, who assists Aaron in basting a roast of pork smothered in rosemary and thyme. Potatoes and corn, peeled and shucked earlier, simmer atop the stove. Two pans of homemade rolls complete the meal.

THE PROJECT FLOWS smoothly, each person completing individually assigned tasks under the experienced tutelage of Rivera and Price. "Please" and "thank you" accompany every request.

The menu, planned by the students, is ambitious, a complete meal that meets daily health guidelines, individual taste and dietary limitations. Prepared entirely by the students, it is served sit-down style at a table adorned with bright spring flowers.



Sixth grader Darren Eschbach cuts apples for applesauce.



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Seventh grader Aaron Coventry returns pork roast to oven after basting, during preparation of lunch at Berkshire Middle School in Beverly Hills. Supervising is teacher Sharon Rivera, who helps the students improve their skills, in class for the Educably Mentally Impaired.



Eighth grader Sara Haeflner watches as Marilyn Price, teacher's aide, dishes out a portion for her.

Immediately after recess, lunch is served.

Sara is briefly overcome, tearful at the excitement of a meal waiting to be indulged. A word from Rivera and the tears quickly dry. "This is very good," Sara ultimately concludes.

The only firm rule: Everybody must taste everything, at least one bite. Adhering to the rule, Rivera once had to eat a bite of tuna, a food she detests.



Rivera and students sit down for meal, where classmates toast with Kool-Aid.

also call recipe books and newspapers for additional variations.

"WE'VE FIXED EVERYTHING from hot dogs to vegetable soup from scratch," Rivera said, adding student preference is recipes that are more complicated. In an effort to meet all developmental levels, she also teaches how to prepare instant foods, reading instructions from a box. After one parent raised the question, low-calorie entrees also have been introduced.

Meal preparation takes place entirely in Rivera's classroom. Two years ago the room was outfitted with a stove, kitchen sink, refrigerator and cooking utensils. The room also sports traditional desks, an assortment of academic and learning tools and several computers.

"These kids are capable of so much," Rivera said.

Dennis joins the group late, returning from a regular classroom where he is mainstreamed part of each school day. He digs into the mashed potatoes and apple sauce. "I like them best."

Then, rushing to empty his mouth, he tells whoever is interested, "These are the best teachers we've ever had."

"We learn we can do things for ourselves, take care of ourselves. It's a tremendous feeling of independence. It's very exciting."

— Sharon Rivera
EMI class teacher