

COOKING CONQUESTS



CHEF CAROL HASKINS

Greet guests with Southern hospitality

The van is washed, oil changed, tires checked - we're off to the beautiful state of Kentucky. Our destination is Berea, a small college town on I-75 south of Lexington. Berea is known as the Folk Art Capital of the state. Nestled among the Appalachian foothills is Berea College, a liberal arts college where students receive tuition-free education in return for working in one of their many departments. Students produce exquisite furniture reproductions, woven items, rag rugs, brooms of all shapes and sizes, metal work, pottery, photographic essays of mountain people and much more. Berea is also the home of Boone Tavern Hotel a popular Southern inn built in 1909. Students from the college's hotel management and culinary arts programs operate the inn. The servers are enthusiastic and friendly. Crisp white table linens, sparkling glasses and fresh flowers on tables create an atmosphere of Southern hospitality at its best.

Regional flavor

The dinner menu is prix fixe, but you are sure to find new and different menu offerings with regional flavor. The real reason I keep going back to Boone Tavern is the southern spoon bread. For those of you who haven't tried - or even heard of - spoon bread, it is the most elegant preparation of cornmeal in all of Southern cooking. I find white stone-ground cornmeal makes the best spoon bread and the tastiest, but the white cornmeal found in supermarkets will also produce a fine product. Spoon bread should be moist and soufflé-like with the consistency of baked custard. Spoon bread is best served through-out your meal in a simple stainless-steel bowl straight from the oven - just scoop it out with a large spoon, top with butter and enjoy. The following recipes can produce a delicious meal just in time for holiday entertaining that show Southern hospitality at its finest!

SPoon BREAD

- 1 3/4 cups cornmeal (white)
- 3 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon sugar (optional; the recipe the Tavern Hotel uses does not include sugar)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 eggs (well beaten)
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 3/4 teaspoons baking powder

Bring milk to a boil, add cornmeal gradually and stir constantly for 10 minutes until thick.

Remove from heat - allow to cool for 5 to 10 minutes. The mixture will be very stiff.

Combine eggs, salt, baking powder and melted butter in the bowl of a mixer. Use whip attachment and gradually add cornmeal until well combined. Beat for 15 minutes. Pour into a well-greased, large skillet or two well-greased baking dishes. Bake at 375°F in a pre-heated oven for 30-35 minutes until puffed and lightly browned. Serve immediately.

FRUIT PUNCH

- Juice of 3 lemons
- Juice of 3 oranges
- 1 1/2 to 2 cups of sugar
- 1 cup crushed pineapple
- 1 quart chilled iced tea
- 1/2 cup maraschino cherries, chopped
- 1/2 cup maraschino cherry juice
- 1/2 pint grape juice
- 1 quart ginger ale
- 1 1/2 cups water

Boil the pineapple, water and sugar for 15 minutes. Cool. Add lemon.

Please see CONQUESTS, D2

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Focus on Wine
- Living Better Sensibly

AWREY Bakeries

A sweet wonderland

STORY BY RENEE SKOGLUND • PHOTOS BY BRYAN MITCHELL



Beautiful, big blocks of butter making their way up the conveyor belt toward a huge vat of sticky croissant dough:

Such was my introduction to Awrey Bakeries the day they were making croissants, biscuits, Danish and chocolate cake. Mmmm, the aromas coming from those cavernous baking facilities... like mom's kitchen on steroids!

"It's a precision mom's kitchen. We're trying to define what all those moms do instinctively," said John Curtin, Awrey's president. The croissant dough - all 1,000 glorious pounds - soon would be layered with the butter, rolled to just the right thickness, cut and trimmed to just the right shape, and, finally, baked to perfection. Depending upon the customer's order, Awrey's uses either butter or margarine, but always the meticulous process is the same.

"We'll end up with 32 layers, and that's what make croissants flaky," said Larry Whitucki, director of quality assurance.

The bakery was founded in 1910 in the Detroit kitchen of Mrs. Fletcher Awrey. As her reputation grew, the company opened a succession of neighborhood baked goods stores, supplied from the family's first "volume baking" facility on Tiramam. The three Awrey boys - Elton, Wilbur and Thomas - often made deliveries in a horse-drawn wagon and later in a Model-T truck.

The company moved to its present 26-acre site on Farmington Road in Livonia in 1967. It now has 477 employees with nine family members at the helm. A \$20 million renovation is planned over the next two years. According to Curtin, Awrey's is the largest family-owned bakery in Michigan, probably in the country.

The entire operation is based on blend of technology and taste buds. Every product is tested for height, diameter, weight, appearance and, of course, taste. Working at Awrey's requires self-discipline. I was amazed there weren't a ton of chubby employees. The bakery definitely wouldn't be a stop on a Weight Watcher's tour.

After cooling, the baked goods head to a freezer area the size of the North Pole, where they're held before being shipped out. "Once it's thawed, it tastes homemade," said Curtin, who seldom leaves the office without an armful of goodies.

If the intoxicating smells of almond and chocolate permeate the air at Awrey's, then it's a dusting of flour that covers the floor. It takes a lot of ingredients to produce the 90,000 cases of sweet stuff that's shipped across the nation and to Canada every week. Flour is shipped in by rail car.



Rolling in dough: (Top photo) Chuck Goldston keeps a watchful eye as a load of croissant dough gets poured into a trough. (Above) Kim Oatneal uses a deft stroke to smooth out the icing on an Awrey's Tropical Chocolate Cake. Care to lick the spoon? (Below) Reese Gordon loads trays of unbaked Danish.

Whitucki provided the statistics: 16 million pounds of flour a year, 8 million pounds of sugar a year, and 700 pounds of butter an hour. That's right, an hour!

From croissants, our entourage headed to the Danish department, where the dough is funneled into a cone-shaped twister, precision cut by a culinary guillotine and plopped into a well-greased pan. After they're baked, the Danish are plucked up, a dozen at a time, by a robotic arm and sent on their way to be iced.

Take your pick - raspberry, apple, strawberry or cheese. Whitucki prefers strawberry, while Curtin loves the cheese, but employee Darryl Junior, who loads and unloads trays of Danish all day, doesn't like Danish at all. "I don't eat sweets. That's not

bad, is it?" he asked. "When I look at the fat calories in our Danish Grande, it stops me in my tracks," said Curtin, shaking his head.

As if anything could top croissants and Danish, our next stop was the cakes. A million layers of Awrey's Tropical Chocolate Cakes passed before me on a winding conveyor belt. Employees in white suits and hair nets put the layers together, first slathering them with a coconut filling, then frosting the tops and sides with chocolate.

"It's supposed to taste like an Almond Joy candy bar. That's what we went after," said Rick Krollicki, director of research and development. Our last stop was the taste-test room. Krollicki had formulated a new chocolate cake recipe, and two

Outlet store

For many metro Detroiters, the holidays wouldn't be the holidays without a stop at the Awrey Bakeries Outlet Store.

WHERE: 12301 Farmington Road, Livonia.

STORE HOURS: Open 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday, and 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

CREDIT CARDS: All majors, except American Express.

The outlet store, which Awrey's has expanded four times, offers thrift in prices, not quality. There are no returns from supermarkets. Perhaps the icing on a Danish will be missing a squiggle or two, but all items are fresh.

"If we don't have enough runner-ups, it's front-line products," said John Curtin, Awrey's president.

Awrey's also supplies the outlet with products not available in supermarkets. When it comes to cakes, the outlet sells Peanut Fantasy, Raspberries and Cream, Cherry Cordial, Death by Chocolate, Raspberry Nut, and Cream Cheese Carrot. "We're kind of the test market," said Betty Jean Awrey, vice president.

Awrey's doesn't bake pies, but the outlet carries Grand Traverser pie. They're delicious, said Awrey.

Best of all, said Awrey, everything sells at a reduced price. "We take off the rent we pay in a supermarket."

Would you like to see the face of a loved one on a cake? No problem. That's a piece of cake at Awrey's. Thanks to great-granddaughter Kelly Jean Awrey, the bakery now does "Photo Cakes." A quarter sheet cake sells for \$15, and a half sheet cake sells for \$25.

For more information about the outlet store and Photo Cakes, call (734) 622-1100 or fax (734) 622-1453.

recently baked layers awaited us. The suspense mounted as he inverted the layers onto the counter and sliced off small pieces. The morsels received more scrutiny than a glass of Chablis at a wine-tasting festival: Good texture, fine but dense. Not too crumbly. Will stand up to frosting. Nice color. Great taste.

"I'd give it a 100 percent," said Betty Jean Awrey, vice president. "I love it."

"It's the quality control guy. I'd give it a 99," said Whitucki. "Ninety-nine percent," said Curtin.

As for me? I knew I was participating in an Awrey's milestone: the birth of a new recipe. I gave it a 99.9. After all, I make a pretty good chocolate cake myself.

A little taste of history



Making deliveries: Thomas Awrey "peddles" baskets of freshly made pastries and other goodies in a Detroit neighborhood in the bakery's early days.



Those were the days: Two of the Awrey boys, Tom (left) and Wilbur, stand in front of one of the company's first delivery vehicles, a horse-drawn wagon.



Sweet delivery: A Model-T truck pulls out of Awrey's first "volume baking" facility on Tiramam Street in Detroit.

An Awrey's memory

Margaret Carter, 81, of Redford Township remembers when the Awrey's delivery truck would come through her neighborhood twice a week in the late '50s and early '60s. Her children were young, and she was a stay-at-home mom who didn't know how to drive a car. She counted on the milkman at her back door and the Awrey's man at her front door.

"There were two brothers, Ralph and Bob. I think they'd come to the door with big baskets full of goodies. I'd buy the lunch sticks with white frosting, the cucumber sliced high with chocolate frosting and nuts, and I'd buy the Long John coffee cake."

"I remember that truck smelling so good. They'd pull out the milkies, and I'd say, 'I'll take this. I'll take that.'"

"Sometimes, if I didn't have enough money, they would charge it. They kept track in a little brown book. I'd pay them at the end of the week. They were so nice."

Carter longs to stop inside that truck one more time. "I'd give anything to have a Long John coffee cake. I wish they still made deliveries."