

Suburban Life

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'Just like grandma used to make'

Grandchildren carry on family tradition of cake decorating

By Lorraine McClellan
staff writer

The two young women who own and operate Mrs. Maddox Cake Shop mean it very literally when they say the pastries they prepare every day are "just like grandma used to make."

They do not own a freezer and have no intention of buying one. Nor will they ever use a preservative or anything that is pre-mixed.

"We have nothing left over at the end of the day to freeze because all of our cakes and tea sandwiches are only made as they are ordered for pick-up that day," said Susan Kelley.

"We're still using the boiled icing that grandma used which has become our trademark," said Marian O'Neil. "It's something that takes a little more time than butter cream icing, but it's one of the things that make us unique and carries on the tradition."

The tradition started with Pearl Still Maddox, Kelley and O'Neil's grandmother, 56 years ago in Detroit. Early this summer the shop was moved to the shopping mall on the corner of Orchard Lake Road and 12 Mile.



Susan Kelley puts the final touches to a cake decorated with boiled icing that has become the trademark for Mrs. Maddox Cake Shop.

Staff photos by Randy Borst

THE SISTERS say they grew up with Mrs. Maddox Cake Shop while it was thriving in Detroit, garnering customers from the entire city and many of its suburbs.

Neither had any intention of turning the shop into a career for themselves. Both worked in the bakery after school and did double duty during the holidays.

In O'Neil's words, "We never had to worry about a summer job."

In Kelley's words, "We learned every aspect of the business, but were pretty tired of it."

When it was time to leave for college, both sought careers that were a long way from the culinary arts.

O'Neil graduated from college with a teaching degree at a time the job market was flooded with teachers. Kelley entered the Michigan State Police Academy for a career in criminal justice while the school was in the midst of a lawsuit that eventually closed it down for better than a year.

That was in 1977 when they took over the management of the shop for their father Jack Still who was thinking about retiring.

Now they say they can't think of a more enjoyable business to be in.

THE SISTERS employ about 15 in the shop. They help with every part of the operation, but they alone do all the cake decorating.

"We're the only ones who know how to do it," O'Neil said of the boiled icing trademark, laid on with a spoon that gives the cake a fluted effect.

"And we make all the flowers by hand," Kelley added. "A rose is a rose and still a rose, so making it the way grandma did helps perpetuate the tradition."

The tradition spans three generations now for both the pastry makers and the customers. The sisters say it is not unusual for them to meet someone who says the shop made their mother's wedding cake, or the cake for an uncle's graduation.

Pearl Still began baking cakes when she was a widow with two small sons, from a shop on Chicago and Lindwood Avenue in Detroit, with her sister. The shop was called "Pearl and Jessie's." She went into business for herself after her second marriage.

"Even though the cake shop carried her second husband's name, it was all hers. She ran it by herself, adding the tea sandwiches, the finger pastries, the hors d'oeuvres, as she went along," Kelley said.

"But it wasn't until she made Anne Morrow's wedding cake that she really became known. That would have been sometime in the '30s. She used that one cake (for the Anne Morrow-Charles Lindbergh wedding) to build up the entire business," O'Neil said.

MRS. MADDOX Cake Shop was located in Detroit, on Seven Mile near the John Lodge Freeway for almost 50 years. The move to Farmington Hills was scary," O'Neil said.

"It was a hard decision. A lot of our customers had moved, of course. We didn't know if we should be following them or if they would follow us. It was a particularly hard decision because so much of our business is done on the phone," Kelley said.

"Some of our customers only call us for special occasion cakes, and we're sure we've lost some of them, but Christmas was wonderful for us."

"As big as this is," she said of their new quarters, "it was filled almost constantly; our best season to date. We're making new customers now and we know old ones are finding us."

In addition to celebrating their "best season to date" in their new place of business, the two owners will be celebrating the 100th birthday of their Grandma Maddox this year.



All of the decorations that go on the cakes are made by hand on the day they are ordered for pick up. Marian O'Neil cuts petals for a cake from a pastry tube.



Marian O'Neil (at left) and Susan Kelley grew up learning the bakery business from their grandmother. Now they are operators and owners of Mrs. Maddox Cake Shop which moved into Farmington Hills last spring.

Family reunion

Antique key opens more than a door for descendants

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

More than three quarters of a century ago, members of the Shapira family in Toronto helped dedicate the Machikei Hadaf Synagogue there.

Afterward, the synagogue was important to immigrants through the years. Coming from Europe, they found in that house of worship a place for

prayer and education and a place to find others like themselves.

Today, the synagogue has been torn down and a department store stands in its place.

The key to that synagogue became the focal point of a family reunion last October when more than 100 family members from six countries gathered. Like those immigrants, the descendants of the Shapiras have found one another after a long search.

Southfield resident Boris Shapira and Birmingham resident Nena Dillick played active roles in bringing together many uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces, whose forebears were four brothers who once worked for an Austrian baron.

Held at a Toronto Hotel, the reunion was the culmination of a five year dream.

"My grandson, Asher Zelig, two years old, was introduced," said Southfielder Shapira, proudly, adding the oldest participant was 92.

DILLICK who was born in the Philippines and married Dr. Sidney Dillick after they met in a graduate program of social work there, has always been curious about family members.

"My husband was from Toronto and I knew there were Shapiras in Pittsburgh and I always wondered about them," she said.

Then, five years ago she attended a conference of the National Conference of Jewish Women in Pittsburgh determined to look up the family.

"But I didn't have to," she explained. "On my program I found the name Freda Shapira listed as a discussion leader and I arranged to meet her."

Dillick asked her relative if her husband had family in Toronto and did they come from Galicia?

"We sat on the floor taking notes and I learned her mother-in-law lived in a home for aged just as mine did in Toronto. Later we lunched together and I brought pictures of the family."

"My husband looks identical to his brother who had passed away." Discovery of their Pittsburgh relatives brought them close enough to travel to family functions after that.

"THEN when Sid and I went to Toronto, his Uncle Sammy told us he had a key used to open a synagogue by the family more than 70 years ago."

"Asher Zelig, one of four brothers, lived in Toronto, (Boris Shapira's father) and donated the land for the synagogue," she said.

"His wife was to dedicate it by opening the door but one week before, she had a heart attack and died. A niece, Giti Pike, opened the door with a long, ornate key."

Pike treasured the long, slender key and the honor of being chosen for such a special task. Her great-grandfather's name was inscribed on it in English and Hebrew also. Later in life, she gave the key to

her daughter, who turned it over to her brother, Sammy.

When Dillick's uncle said he had that key, Nena Dillick responded the key should go to the Shapira family in Pittsburgh. "He agreed and, I said we should have a get together," she said.

For five years they planned. And always illness or some other complication prevented it. Finally, last October the family reunion was organized.

"Descendants of the brothers: Asher

Zelig, Moshe Yankel, Yitschok and Yehudah Hersh were invited," she said. "The phone bills between Pittsburgh and here were pretty big."

"WE KNEW nothing about Yitschok who had stayed in Europe. Finding all the descendants was a huge job. We sent invitations to all we knew and three weeks later, Freda Shapira

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'Descendants of the brothers: Asher Zelig, Moshe Yankel, Yitschok and Yehudah Hersh were invited. The phone bills between Pittsburgh and here were pretty big.'

— Nena Dillick

'It was something. I'll never forget. Imagine meeting so many cousins and having the other side of our family present the key back to us.'

— Boris Shapira

