

Korstjens is a master with pastries



By Sharon Dargay
staff writer

Baking for more than 3,000 hospital patients a day is literally a piece of cake for Leon Korstjens.

The Troy man traded his rolling pin for an ink pen at St. John's Hospital last year, taking over baking supervision at the northeast Detroit facility.

With 34 years experience in front of the oven, Korstjens also ranks with nine other cooks nationwide as a "master pastry chef." That's the highest distinction that a baker can attain through the American Culinary Federation, a professional association for

the food industry.

The federation waived a required 10-day cooking test for Korstjens last month and granted him the ranking based on experience and training.

"I'm not familiar with bread, rolls or doughnuts. I've done fancier pastries — wedding cakes, tortes, French pastry and Danish," Korstjens said.

IT MAY ALL seem a bit ostentatious for cafeteria food, but Korstjens hopes to make St. John's the "London Chop House" of Detroit-area hospitals.

"Friends say, 'gee, how did you end up in the hospital?' It's a challenge," Korstjens

said. "You have a limited amount and certain kind of ingredients to use because of all the sicknesses the people have there."

"But you can still bring out a good piece of pastry."

A native of Holland, Korstjens took the job for health reasons, closing shop on his 10-year-old catering business last October. He occasionally bakes for fund-raisers and friends, but seldom cooks at home.

"I don't eat too much sweets, but I like a good piece of Danish or coffee cake," he admitted.

Korstjens was 14 years old when he struck up a friendship with a professional baker, sparking his interest in the food in-

dustry. From June 1968 to 1970 he worked for a cruise ship and then for KLM, the Dutch airlines, before emigrating to America in 1973.

BIS CONFECTIONS have filled party carts at Macys restaurants in Birmingham and the Hotel Ponce de Leon. Through the Michigan Chiefs de Cuisine, a professional association for cooks and bakers, he also volunteers his skills for fund-raisers. He'll make crullers, a French-style doughnut, for a fund-raiser on May 6 at Cranbrook schools, in Bloomfield Hills.

"I always wanted to be in baking right from the beginning. I wanted to be the best. I've been successful with this," he said.

Leon Korstjens' specialties are luscious tortes and French and Danish pastries.

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