

Go to any kid's birthday party these days, and you'll be amazed at the variety of entertainment parents are willing to trot out for their little darlings: laser tag, bounce houses, ponies, rented rock walls. . . . But when it comes to birthday party vittles, there is little variety. Kids (and parents who choose to stick around) are most likely treated to a slice of pizza and a hunk of yellow sheet cake with not much imagination.

But what if little Susie or Billie got a surprise on their next Big Day: what if the pizza WAS the birthday cake? Not a pepperoni pie with a candle, but a real homemade confection.

Debbie Meyer has found a way to make a cake — an honest-to-goodness put-a-candle-in-it-for-your-birthday cake — that looks so much like a pizza, she may get a call from a concerned Buddy LaRosa.

Using honed baking talent and a good deal of business savvy, the Hamilton Township woman has created "My Pizza Cake," a specialty cake business started in her own kitchen that has grown to national prominence in just a few short months. With flour, sugar and some ingenuity, Meyer has found herself a sweet slice of the American dream.

But behind this success lies a story of personal pain. So much has happened so quickly to Meyer this year, one wouldn't blame her for being a little breathless. But the rapid turn of events doesn't seem to faze her. It's all part of her plan to build financial security for her young family, because it wasn't long ago when Meyer wasn't so sure there would be enough money to keep a roof over her head.



PROFILE: DEBORAH MEYER



DEBORAH MEYER

BORN:

DEBORAH ABBOTT, VINE GROVE,
KENTUCKY, 1967

STATUS:

MARRIED: TO SCOTT MEYER.
CHILDREN: TESS, 8, GRANT, 3

BUSINESS:

OWNER, MY PIZZA CAKE,
LEGAL LIBRARY MANAGER,
LEXIS/NEXIS

LAST RESTAURANT VISITED:

MIMI'S CAFÉ

FAVORITE FOOD:

CHOCOLATE

FAVORITE PASTIME:

TRAVEL

BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED:

BE YOURSELF

BEST ADVICE EVER GIVEN:

BE HAPPY WITH WHO YOU ARE.

SUCCESS MEANS:

THE FINANCIAL SECURITY TO MAKE
SURE MY KIDS WILL ALWAYS BE
TAKEN CARE OF.

Born in tiny Vine Grove, Kentucky, young Deborah Abbott grew up in the shadow of the Fort Knox military base. She went to the University of Kentucky and made her family proud when she graduated and went on to earn a law degree in 1992. She came back home and hung out her shingle in nearby Radcliff, Kentucky, and started handling all sorts of cases the soldiers and their families brought in. One thing became glaringly apparent: she hated it.

"I clerked for bankruptcy and worker's comp attorneys in school and knew immediately I didn't want to do that," she said. "And in Radcliff, I saw divorces, bankruptcy, lots of soldiers from Fort Knox. I worked four months and quit."

She was lucky enough then to land a job with Lexis/Nexis, the subscription information service, managing their legal library content [which she still does.] She met her first husband, got married and had a baby girl, Tess. But in 1999, just when she seemed to be finding herself, her first marriage broke apart. After a messy parting of ways,

Meyer found herself a single mom in Cincinnati, trying to make ends meet for her and her toddler daughter. She kept her job with Lexis/Nexis, but with rent, car payments and now a daughter to save for, she began looking for ways to add to her tiny family's income.

She says she still battles the demons from the break-up of her first marriage. Her doctor diagnosed her with a form of exercise bulimia, a condition that compels her to work out for hours on end in an attempt to burn calories and stay thin. While she says she is much better than she used to be, working with sweets on a daily basis ratchets up the compulsion to get on the treadmill. And for a confirmed chocoholic, it's even more of a challenge. "I have to wipe my hands constantly to keep the chocolate off," she says. But Meyer has taken the approach that keeping those hands busy can only help her in the long run.

In 2004, she launched Dragonon, Inc., a small publishing company that handles fantasy, religion and youth humor books. A life-long goal of Meyer's, it has grown

from a one-woman company without a single signed title to a growing stable of published authors with successful books. Along the way, she found a stable home life with her husband Scott, and a new addition to the family, Grant.

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And that’s where the idea for My Pizza Cake comes in. Always interested in cooking for her family in general, and baking specifically, Meyer started toying with cake designs for her own kids’ birthdays, making one more complicated than the next. A Backyardigans cake for her son Grant got the ball rolling toward a more disciplined approach.

She delved deeper into ingredients, decorating and design, even working on Saturdays as an apprentice at Artrageous Desserts in Symmes Township. She couldn’t help be inspired by the business’s over-the-top wedding cakes and show stopping confections.

“I studied what they did and then tried trial-and-error at home,” she says. And the more she learned, the more she knew she wanted to pursue a business herself. “I wanted to find my niche,” she says. “And my husband said, ‘why don’t you try to make one that looks like a pizza?’“

Meyer worked dozens of hours perfecting her technique for toppings and for developing a crust that would have both a delicious flavor and would withstand those piles of toppings, made from sugared fruits, toffee, caramel, fondant and a variety of chocolates. When she had a few cakes under her belt and some dazzled customers, she took steps to incorporate her business in the spring. And after an inspection of her home kitchen by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, she got her baker’s license in June. She got a website up and running and not long after that, she got a small mention on the front page of the Life section of the Cincinnati Enquirer. That’s when things started to take off.

“I got a lot of business from that,” she laughs. “A

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Ingredients:

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup butter
- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tbs. cocoa
- 1 tsp. allspice
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 eight oz. can crushed pineapple
- 1 cup Angel Flake coconut
- 1 pt. Blackberry or strawberry jam

Method:

- Combine eggs, butter, sugar and buttermilk in a mixer and combine well.
- Add flour, cocoa, allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg and soda until combined.
- Add pecans, raisins, pineapple, coconut and jam and stir by hand.
- Grease and flour three 9” pans and bake in a pre-heated oven at 350 degrees for 20 - 30 minutes.

Frosting:

- Bring 1 cup light brown sugar and 1 stick of butter to a boil.
- When sugar is dissolved add ¼ can of condensed milk and let cool.
- Add 1 lb. box of sifted powdered sugar and 1 tbs. vanilla. If you desire a thicker icing, you can add more milk and powdered sugar.

Yield: One Cake



Ingredients:

- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ lb. semi sweet chocolate
- 8 egg yolks
- 1 egg
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 shot double espresso
- 1 tbs. - 10x - sugar

Chocolate Cream Method:

- Bring the milk and sugar to a boil in a medium sauce pan.
- Add the chocolate pieces and stir until melted.
- Bring back to a boil, mix egg with yolks and add slowly to milk.

Cooking Method:

- Pour the base into 8 half-cup ramekins.
- Place them in bain-marie with hot water half-way.
- Bake for 20 – 30 minutes in oven at 350°.
- Whip heavy cream with 10 x sugar. Add cold espresso slowly into the cream.
- Place in pastry bag and keep in the refrigerator.
- When chocolate ramekins are cooked put them in the refrigerator until serving.
- Place some heavy cream in the center of ramekin. Serve cold.

Nat's Notes:

Serve the crème with your favorite cookies - something you have with coffee.

Yield: Serves 8 •

Sauce Method:

- Mix fish and chicken stock and heavy cream together and reduce by half.
- Then in the blender, add soft butter until right consistency.
- Salt and pepper to taste. Keep warm.

Preparation:

- Season salmon and cover with tomato compote.
- Add parmesan cheese and bake in oven for 8 to 10 minutes at 350.
- Julienne some fresh basil and add to sauce.

Nat's Notes:

Place some ratatouille on the center of the plate, place the salmon on top and the sauce around. Serve warm.

Yield: Serves 6

After declining the position at Martin Berasategui, he returned home to Walnut Hills to open Seny's. Maier advises that opening a restaurant isn't for the faint of heart. "If you don't really love it, you shouldn't do it."

So why did Maier chose to open a Spanish restaurant? "I was looking for something in Cincinnati that hasn't been done. The European Spanish restaurant hadn't been tried successfully. We're not going to concede to the top five restaurants in Cincinnati. We're going to be better."

Restaurant goers can expect to find a mix of traditional and non-traditional Spanish fare on the menu. "A third of the menu is very traditional, (such as) calamari with lemon and croquettes. The other two-thirds of the menu is cutting edge in terms of cuisine. We have a whole lot of seafood and local products."

When I asked if he was nervous about Seny's opening on October 11th, he replied, "A little. It hasn't set in yet." With deep roots in the restaurant industry and a few notches on his belt, it will be interesting to see how far Maier's confident nature and passion for cooking will take him in his quest to outperform Cincinnati's top restaurants.... Even after it all sets in. •

lot of people called me, including Jones the Florist and Sweets in Bloom." A division of Jones the Florist, Sweets in Bloom is a purveyor of candy bouquets and other edible gifts. "They asked me to come up with a fudgie brownie pizza to sell in their national catalog." From there, the offers began pouring in.

"One woman wanted two cakes for groom's cakes for a wedding in New Jersey. She wanted them packaged so she could drive them there," Meyer said. Now, places like bigg's and Kroger are courting Meyer, hoping to carry her treats in their stores.

Don't imagine these are the cutesy, run-of-mill round layer cakes with pretty icing on top. These are cakes that mess with your mind. Take the "Must Have Meat" cake, a riff on the all-meat pizza. A cake crust is topped with pepperoni, sausage, hamburger and bacon bits, even shredded cheese, all made to look exactly like the real thing from some sinfully sweet ingredients. The 10-inch round or 16-inch round cake arrives in its own pizza box, taking the deception one step farther. That first bite may be the most surreal food experience you've ever had.

Despite all the challenges she has faced, Meyer knows that if the heavy hitters come knocking at her door, she'll be ready.

"Emotionally, I'm ready. I know what it takes," she said. "I've got my suppliers in line, I've ordered a freezer to hold inventory. I'm ready." She also knows that, with the way things are going, she won't be able to churn out enough pizzas from her home kitchen for long.

"I'm not working to have a store front where people can walk in and pick up cakes," she says. "I'm just working toward having a store where I can do the baking and not take over the whole kitchen!"

And if that dream comes true, parents and children everywhere can rejoice. There will be no more cake without imagination, only fond memories and an empty pizza box. •