

The Cakery

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A sweet decade for Bowie's Cakery owners : Greg and Gail Sinkovic give residents their just desserts

**By ANNETTE ESTERHELD Staff
Writer**

Once you've tasted the chocolate croissant that Greg Sinkovic makes at The Cakery, it's unlikely you'll be satisfied with one from a grocery store ever again.

Sinkovic and his wife Gail opened their small bakery in the rear of Hilltop Plaza Nov. 1, 1996. He's a pastry chef; she's a restaurant manager. Those chocolate croissants are just one of the many reasons for the success of The Cakery.

Greg said it takes two days to make the croissants that he creates from scratch.

"There are 11 layers of dough, and between each one you add butter. The dough has to rest, and you finish the pastry on the second day," he said.

That croissant dough is also used to make cinnamon raisin buns that Gail said are a favorite of customers. Other leftover dough shows up in pastries like the caramel custard-filled croissant pudding cake.

The Sinkovics met at the Westin Hotel in Washington, D.C., where Gail, a graduate of Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, was working as a restaurant manager when Greg arrived as an apprentice pastry chef.

Already a chef, Greg had been working in many roles in restaurants in his home state of Michigan. He came to D.C. to attend a culinary school, but the school closed and Greg arrived at the Westin.

"I wasn't intending to be a pastry chef, but I liked the hours and lifestyle," said Greg, who grew up in a household where desserts were usually limited to ice cream. When he finished his apprenticeship, his first job was as assistant pastry chef in Hilton Head, S.C. By then he and Gail were married and she went with him to South Carolina. "It was expensive living. I was offered a job here and I jumped at the opportunity to come back," said Gail, who grew up in Bowie.

For five years Greg worked as a chef for Classic Catering in Baltimore and created wedding cakes at the couple's home. He quit his catering job to do wedding cakes only, and at that point they decided they wanted to own their own bakery.

The Sinkovics chose Hilltop because the shop's location had once been a Chinese carry-out and there was a kitchen in place. The shop was health-department ready.

The plan was for Gail to keep her restaurant job so the couple would have a "paycheck," but after an article by Cheryl Allison in this newspaper a month after The Cakery opened, the business took off and hasn't stopped in 10 years.

"It was a huge risk. I was very nervous, but we never looked back," Gail said. "One thing that's been great is the Bowie community, which loves to support a small local business."

And, she adds, "word about good food travels. Our bakery is an acquired taste. There's no comparison and no turning back once you've tasted Greg's pastries, cookies, pies, cakes and other items."

"If you don't come early, you could walk in to find empty shelves," said Gail, who keeps the business's books and manages the front of the shop. Greg does the baking in the kitchen. Together they buy supplies and keep up with the inventory needed to run a very successful bakery that uses, in a week's time, 40 to 50 pounds of chocolate - Belgian only, says Greg - as well as 200 pounds of sugar and between 150 to 200 pounds of flour.

"I like to make a lot with chocolate. People love chocolate. It brings satisfaction to people," said Greg. Chocolate lovers looking for something a bit different this Thanksgiving should try the pumpkin sponge cake with milk chocolate mousse that he created.

For Christmas, regulars are already dreaming of his traditional *Buche De Noel*, a yellow sponge cake rolled with chocolate mousse then iced and decorated like a yule log. Christmas will also bring another of Greg's favorites: chocolate raspberry Sabayon cake, a rich chocolate cake with chocolate mousse and raspberry liqueur and decorated with more chocolate.

Between them they work more than 120 hours a week and take care of a family as well. The couple has two children: daughter Gabriella, a student at Bowie High, and son Garin, who attends Rockledge Elementary.

"Our work is very demanding," said Gail. "Both of us could be working in Baltimore or D.C., but we want to be home and share with our children, not dealing with daily traffic."

"We're early to bed and early to rise," said Greg. "That's the nature of our work." The Sinkovics work well together, balancing the strengths each has to run their business.

"We share fairly and we balance well our gifts and talents and experiences," said Gail, who didn't know how to correctly hold a pastry bag when they opened the shop but now decorates many of the cakes and loves doing it.

"We banter back and forth," said Greg. "She knows what the customers want and what we need to make on a regular basis. I get caught up in creative ideas and in meeting customers' special requests when they bring in family recipes or photos of something they like."

They both agree they like being in the relaxed atmosphere of having their own mom-and-pop business rather than being at a busy hotel or restaurant.

"We accommodate each other. We're both experienced in the corporate world," said Greg, "but we wanted to work for ourselves. We blend."

Greg trained at L'Academie de Cuisine in Maryland, and his instructor was former White House pastry chef Roland Mesnier. Greg passes on that training to the pastry students from area colleges and schools who study with him.

Perhaps someday he'll sign on to teach at local culinary schools or maybe he'll open a country club restaurant and be his own pastry chef, but for now people from Bowie and all over Maryland visit Greg and Gail at The Cakery to order their baked goodies, like the carrot cake with Greg's creamy homemade butter cream frosting. Yummy.

The Cakery is open Tuesdays through Fridays 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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