

Smithson Valley High School valley•ventana Spring Branch, Texas

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Perched on stools and chairs around the stainless steel table in the culinary kitchen, budding chefs watched permanent substitute Cynthia Biggs air brush a cake shaped like a roast turkey, sprinkling stories and tips throughout her demonstration.

Biggs used cakes in various shapes and sizes and frostings of many colors to teach the culinary arts classes how to decorate cakes on Oct. 15. "It's interesting to see how she does it," junior Richard Barrera-Frey said. "It's amazing."

Biggs transformed one cake into a snowball ornament.

"First you bake a half- sphere shaped cake," Biggs said. "Now, cover two-thirds of the cake in blue icing."

She grabbed a wet sponge and dabbed at the blue frosting to smooth the texture.

"Don't be afraid of the frosting," she said. "People get so scared of it. It's just frosting."

All Business: Decorating a snowflake cake, Cynthia Biggs teaches culinary classes techniques. "The Cake Lady" came to create art with frosting. (Photo by Mauricio Aguilar)

While students expected to see Biggs subbing in their science or math classrooms, they were not used to seeing her as a master of the spatula and icing bags.

Forty years earlier, Biggs grew up working in her family's restaurant, Schwamkrug's, which bought pastries from Dale's Bakery in New Braunfels. "My mom was a caterer," Biggs said. "I grew up in a restaurant."

After watching "Dale" frost the cakes, she shyly asked her mother if she could learn how to do it. "She said, 'Ask him yourself,'" Biggs said. "I did, and he pushed it all over toward me and said, 'Knock yourself out.'" Since then, Biggs has worked in several restaurants and bakeries, usually with her mother.

"(My mom and I) bought a bakery in New Braunfels," Biggs said. "I worked at all of her places." Holding up a small plastic container, Biggs described how her decorating supplies once could fit into it. Now she owns a 20-by-30 foot stainless steel kitchen filled with supplies. Biggs no longer works with her mother, but she does have her own baking business that she manages in addition to substitute teaching.

"My business is called 'The Cake Lady,'" Biggs said. "I do birthdays, anniversaries, weddings. You name it, I do it."

Biggs' extensive culinary experience means she brings a certain expertise to the classroom.

"I've enjoyed teaching," Biggs said. "I like to see students take (information) and use it."

Her masterful demonstration also included frosting cakes shaped like a spider and a winter wonderland. Senior Braden Connally put the white snowflake sprinkles on the snowball ornament cake.

"It feels like you are actually accomplishing something, unlike in other classes," Connally said.

Barrera-Frey carried the finished products to the display table.

"I feel like I can make this a future for myself,"

Barrera-Frey said. "It brings everyone together. We're a family interacting together; we make new friends."



Biggs skillfully designs a cake to look like a Thanksgiving meal turkey. (Photo by Micaela Mangan)

Story by: Hannah Gray and Rebecca Covington

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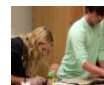


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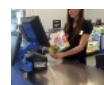
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