

Cake-Off

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schedule) and some of the “surprise” moments weren’t quite as they appeared.

We also learned a few hints and tips from the experts as they answered questions from passionate bakers in the crowd. If you want the decorations to last, forget buttercream and always choose fondant, which provides more flexibility and stability. You can color your own fondant, but if you need black, buy it precolored for a more consistent hue. A satin finish to the icing will show every imperfection; choose matte and spray the surface with non-stick cooking spray to add sheen. Softasilk is the preferred cake flour for high volume and fine crumb. And when you’re producing a dozen cakes a week you must own a mechanical sheeter.

Rolling out fondant is a labor-intensive process, and covering several layers of cake requires several pounds of fondant. When an audience member asked about the giant silver rolling pin versus the machine, Jay invited her up to the table and handed her the rolling pin. After a few minutes, she was exhausted and the fondant was still too thick to use. Jay

folded up the piece of fondant and ran it through the sheeter (imagine a giant pasta machine) three or four times. In moments, the icing was ready to drape over the cake. Lesson learned.

By early afternoon, the shape of each cake was clear and the bakers were focused on the fine details. During the final hour or so, the audience gave the contestants another challenge: join the plunge on Sunday. Because of schedule conflicts, Dana, Kendra and Johanna couldn’t participate. Jay and Corina responded with a challenge of their own: if the audience contributed a total of \$500 to Special Olympics, they’d make the plunge. As you can imagine, the banter ranged from fear to bravado as water temperatures were quoted and the collection box made its way around the room. Support for Special Olympics was in full fervor and freezing fears were realized as the dollar total was quickly met. Now the two bakers had to find bathing suits!

At 3 p.m., the work stopped and the four judges were sent to work. Matt Amis, dining editor from Delaware Today; Innae Park, news anchor from WMDT; and Caitlin Coughlan, Special Olympics Delaware athlete, joined me to survey the cakes. We found each team’s sketched-out plan of its cake, saw the changes team members made during the competition and admired their ability to complete a three-day project in a few hours.

Team Two built a five-layer crazy cake, decorated with the names of repeat plunge participants and the 20th anniversary logo. A multicolored inner tube was set in crystal blue water, holding offset icebergs, draped with a fondant scarf, strewn with miniature snowflakes and topped with a white chocolate polar bear. Team One assembled a sliver of Rehoboth on a sandy beach at water’s edge, complete with swimming polar bears. Above the realistic storefronts, a large polar bear emerged from



The two teams’ creations: a “cool” polar bear watching over a sliver of Rehoboth Beach, left, and a five-layer crazy cake celebrating 20 years of the Polar Bear Plunge.

his igloo, sporting sunglasses, ski cap and scarf. A surfboard painted with the Special Olympics logo and crashing waves of molded sugar framed the scene. While Team One won the Critic’s Choice Award, both teams celebrated the Polar Bear Plunge with engineering ingenuity and decorating skill, all in support of a very worthy cause. I can’t wait for next year’s challenge!

Fondant Icing
 1/2 C shortening
 1/2 C light corn syrup
 1 t vanilla extract
 1/2 t salt
 1 lb confectioner’s sugar

In a large bowl, combine butter, corn syrup, vanilla and salt in a mixer with a dough hook until smooth. Add the sugar all at once; mix at a slow speed until incorporated. Gradually increase speed to medium and beat until mixture clings together in the bottom of the bowl and is smooth to the touch. To color, knead a small amount of food coloring into the ball of fondant and work with hands until thor-

oughly combined. The fondant may be rolled out to form a sheet to cover a cake layer or cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Store unused fondant in a cool, dry place, wrapped tightly in an airtight container; do not refrigerate or condensation will cause moisture droplets to form.

Yellow Cake
 2 C cake flour
 2 t baking powder
 1/2 t salt
 1/2 C softened butter
 1 C sugar
 3 eggs
 2 t vanilla
 3/4 C milk

Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat

two 9-inch cake pans with non-stick cooking spray. Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt in a bowl; set aside. In a mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs, one at a time; add vanilla and mix until combined. Slowly add flour mixture alternately with milk. Stir after each addition into a smooth batter. Pour the batter into the two prepared pans. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until a tester comes out clean. Cool for 5 minutes in the pans, then invert onto a rack and cool completely before icing.

Send comments, questions or recipe ideas to capeflavors@comcast.net.

ABOUT SODE

Special Olympics Delaware utilizes sports as a platform to create life-changing experiences for everyone involved with its programs. These achievements include building athletes’ capacity to **reach their full potential, improving the delivery of healthcare** to Special Olympics athletes and **changing perceptions of the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities**. For more information on how to get involved or support Special Olympics Delaware, visit sode.org.



The Cake-Off judges are (l-r) Innae Park, WMDT news anchor; Matt Amis, Delaware Today dining editor; Denise Clemons; and Caitlin Coughlan, Special Olympics Delaware athlete and serious foodie.

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