



Betty's CAKES

By Robin Larson • Photos by Jessica Sauck

“If your name is on this project, it has to be good!”

Those words of her father’s play in her head each time Betty Van Der Weide bakes and decorates one of her amazing cakes.

Betty has been making cakes since 1966, just two years after graduating from Maurice/Orange City (Iowa) High School. Back then, good friends asked her to make their wedding cake, and she did. “I really had never done any kind of cake decorating at all before January 1966,” she says. “Being young and a little stupid, I said ‘yes.’ And I began to practice, practice, practice.” Betty’s dad watched over the whole affair, and imparted to her those words that have stuck with her for more than 40 years: “If your name is on this project, it has to be good!” “I have always remembered that and try to do that with every cake I do,” she says. “When I look back at photos of that first cake, it was not award-winning, but it wasn’t bad for the first wedding cake.”

A year later, Betty married Rod Van Der Weide, the beau who had grown up two houses down the street, and began her

family. Rod worked as a long-distance truck driver, and Betty stayed home with their two kids Scott and Robin. “When the kids were small, we felt that since Rod was gone all week, it was best if I was home with the kids,” says Betty. The cake decorating gave Betty something to do in Rod’s absence and Betty says, “It really was a hobby that turned into a business without me realizing what was happening.”

For years, Betty worked on her cakes in her kitchen. “The kids ate on the living room floor so often as the table was filled with cakes,” she says. “So, we finally decided to add a room onto the house, just for doing cakes. At that point, our accountant said, ‘Betty, when you borrow money for your hobby, you are now an official business.’”

Betty still marvels at how things fell into place. “It was all a part of God’s plan for us,” she explains. ►



Trends in Wedding Cakes:

- Cakes stacked directly on each other without pillars
- Smaller cakes
- Colored frosting, not just the flowers
- Popular flavors: white and chocolate
- Fillings are popular as well: raspberry, strawberry, lemon, Bavarian Cream, chocolate
- Nine out of ten wedding cakes Betty does have “fondant” frosting. This is a type of frosting that you roll out and lay across the cake. Makes a beautiful, smooth finish and keeps the cake moist longer.



Betty's Cakes is open by appointment only (daytime, evening and Saturdays). To set up an appointment, call Betty at 712.567.4281 or e-mail her at: rodbetty@mtcnet.net.

For more information and to see photos of the cakes Betty has made, check out her website at: www.bettyscakes.com.



Betty is quick to point out that her business would not have been a success without her “right hand man,” husband Rod. “He is a truck driver. He would put on 3,000 miles a week, but make sure he was home every Friday night to help deliver wedding cakes,” says Betty. “I have rarely delivered any wedding cakes without him. He is my best help.”

Rod encourages Betty when she is tired and frustrated with an order that isn’t working out the way she planned, and, Betty says, “He goes with me to every bridal show I do and talks to every bride and her mother. And he can find every place we have to deliver to, plus he backs up our Betty’s Cakes trailer perfectly every time. He works so hard all week long, and when he comes home, he works for me all weekend and never complains.” And, she doesn’t have to pay him. “Good help like that is very hard to find,” she adds.

Rod is quick to point out, “First and foremost, Betty is the brain, talent and skill in this wedding cake business. She is also the business manager. I just drive the car, do dishes and mop the floor. Therein lies my skill.” This mutual admiration is undoubtedly the reason the couple works so well together.

Over the years, Betty has made hundreds of wedding cakes (and many for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and more, when they fit into her busy schedule). In all that time, says Betty, “We have been very lucky. Our car only stopped one time in 43 years, and that was not a big problem.”

“Every bride is different,” Rod says. “Betty has done cakes for well-known people and we have brought them to state-of-the-art reception halls. I have also brought wedding cakes to the bars. Every effort is made to ensure the bride gets exactly what she has dreamed of. We even at one time set up the wedding cake for the bride even though her groom skipped the country on the day of the wedding! The bride paid for the service, and we did everything just as if the wedding was going to take place....I did feel a little out of place though when the bride and her friends were singing, ‘we hate men,’” says Rod.

Betty’s wedding cake service includes not just the cake, but also a choice of “backdrops.” Betty explains, “For years people would send photos to me of their wedding cake and so often it was of the bride and groom, the cake and maybe an exit sign in the background or a drinking fountain, something that was not adding to the picture. I started telling people to think about that when deciding where they set the wedding cake display. Somehow, we started doing that for customers and soon it became something we did nearly every time. Presentation is over half the cake,” she says.

Betty’s backdrops include a lattice screen, a rustic arbor, cherry wood screen or a cathedral screen. Betty adds chiffon, garland, candles or beads and backlights the cakes as well. The lighting is dramatic, especially when used with one of Betty’s glass-topped tables. Betty and Rod set up (and tear down) the table, the cake, the backdrop and lighting, as part of their service. “So the only thing a bride has to do is make a sign that says ‘cake’, tape it to the floor in the reception sight, and we do the rest,” says Betty. Betty and Rod even box up the leftover cake for the couple at the end of the day. “It’s a great service,” says Betty, “We try to make the day as easy for the bride and her family as possible.”

When Rod and Betty aren’t scurrying around making and delivering wedding cakes (sometimes six in one week), they spend as much time as they can with their four beautiful granddaughters. And who knows? Maybe one of the granddaughters will grow up to carry on Grandma’s unique cake business. Only time will tell. *W*



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