



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

Azalea Festival Cake Challenge a sweet success

Allison Ballard

Citydesk@StarNewsOnline.com

Published: Sunday, April 11, 2010 at 6:42 p.m.

Pounds of sugar and flour, mountains of buttercream and fondant, hundreds of gum paste flowers, and – of course – hours of work made the first N.C. Azalea Festival Cake Challenge a sweet success.

More than 800 people lined up outside Cape Fear Community College's Schwartz Center to check out the 23 cakes made by local professional and amateur bakers and vote for their favorite. A few got to try to decorate their own palm-sized cakes with the help of the college's culinary students.



Photo By Matt Born

Judge Lori Eaton examines Kimber Watson's 'Fun For Everyone' cake in the amateur division during the first Azalea Cake Challenge at the Schwartz Center on Sunday, April 11, 2010.

"There are so many great traditions at the festival," said Erica Mearns, president. "But we also wanted to bring a new event that people could get excited about."

When she first saw the hundreds of attendees, she knew the event was a good choice.

"I was just floored," she said. "And thrilled."

Marshall Beatty, executive pastry chef at Country Club of Landfall, practiced decorating his 3-foot, multi-tiered mosaic cake on Styrofoam pieces with his assistants Kasha Plapp and Peter Summers. They used pastel gum paste "tiles" glued with royal icing and subtle white-on-white decoration of champagne bubbles and tiaras. Beatty also tested 19 different cake flavor combinations and put them to a vote. The winner was the vanilla cake with raspberry jam and lemon curd buttercream. The judging panel voted his work as best in the professional category.

La Gemma's Roberta Campani made a Torta Bellagio with a cherry-drenched cake and chocolate chantilly cream. She hand-painted the flowers on top and earned a second-place ribbon.

Hans Westermark of Apple Annie's Bake Shop created a scene from Airlie Gardens that included a royal icing parasol and a chocolate-and-frosting azalea branch. It took the people's choice award in the professional category.

Willy's Bakery didn't compete because of a cake mishap, said Sandee Spradley, co-chair of the event.

Phillip Andrews said his cake required weeks of work and a couple of sleepless nights. Each fondant-covered layer represented a different slice of the festival – from the Cape Fear River and street fair to azalea belles and the circus. The effort was worth it. He took home a second-place ribbon in the amateur category and the people's choice awards.

Oleana Grundman won the blue ribbon in the amateur category for her pearly-pink and green cake, which included a hand-painted river scene and an Azalea belle on top. She's been decorating cakes for more than five years and has competed in national cake shows.

"I incorporated a lot of details," she said. "I know that's something the judges look for."

A friend encouraged Marsheco Furlow to enter the cake competition. She says she's only been decorating cakes for a short time, but was excited about the possibility. She's a fan of cake-themed reality television shows, after all.

"I watch them all the time," she said. Her creation was a parade float, complete with belles, being pulled by a tasty blue car. "I wanted to do something fun and whimsical," she said.

It's uncertain if the event will be back next year. But most of the contestants are hoping there will be a second Cake Challenge.

"We're ready to come back," Beatty said. "There is so much talent in this town. It's been great to see all of the entries. We need something like this."

Copyright © 2011 StarNewsOnline.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.