



For Susan Notter, art is in the pastry In the Spotlight

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Pastry chef Susan Notter teaches a student, Christina Stau...

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Even when Susan Notter was a little girl, growing up in England, she baked.

"I was always in the kitchen. It was the only way to get something sweet as a child," she recalled, noting, "My mother didn't really bake."

Notter turned out cakes decorated like cottages and clocks and hedgehogs with almond quills. "I just had a love for it ... and I was good at it," she said.

She said she didn't excel in her academic subjects, but in home economics, and especially in baking, she found her niche. Indeed, she found her career as a pastry chef — and a celebrated one at that.

Notter, 50, is director of the pastry arts program at The Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts, a division of YTI Career Institute-Lancaster. She has been named one of the top 10 pastry chefs in the United States by Pastry Art & Design magazine.

She has appeared on several Food Network shows, including "Food Network Challenge" and "Halloween Wars" (her team won on the latter show in October). She also takes part in competitions off of the TV screen, and teaches classes to professional pastry chefs as well as to aspiring ones. "It's important to stay visible," she said.

This month, she will head to Rimini, Italy, where she will represent the United States in the "Pastry Queen" competition, an all-female pastry chef contest.

In traveling to Europe, she is returning to the part of the world where her career had its start.

Notter's professional training began when she enrolled in a hotel management course, and she took a weekend job at a Leicestershire pastry shop. "I felt really at home in that environment," she said.

In England, the tradition of baking mostly centered on hearty breads and homespun cakes. To learn how to make the exquisitely detailed pastry she wanted to create, she took jobs in Germany and Switzerland, where she honed her chocolate and decorative sugar skills.

Now a Lancaster County resident, Notter came to the U.S. in 1986 to teach a class, and since then, has established pastry programs first in Maryland, with her ex-husband, Ewald Notter, and then in Alabama. She joined YTI as an adjunct teacher in 2009, and became director of its pastry arts program last year.

While her roots are in Europe, the United States has become her home. "The children have grown up here and my network is here, and moving back would be like starting all over again."

Hometown: Birmingham, England.

Children: Brittney, 23; Nicoll, 19; Steven, 8.

Education: Associate's degree in hotel management from South Fields College, Leicester, England.

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Favorite dessert: That's difficult! Good apple pie with vanilla ice cream.

Favorite comfort food: Roast chicken, mashed potatoes, fresh vegetables.

Favorite Lancaster restaurant: John J. Jeffries.

A chef I admire: Thomas Keller, of The French Laundry, Napa Valley, Calif. ... He's always looking for that level of perfection.

The food I most enjoy working with: Sugar.

My most challenging creations: Pieces for competitions that have to be completed within a time frame and then moved.

What I enjoy most about being on TV: The opportunity to work with the medium for an extended period of time and the challenges that it presents.

What most surprised me about doing TV: How much is edited out.

TV shows I enjoy watching: "House" and "Chopped."

What I do to relax: I like to find local trails and hike. I enjoy dancing and exercise.

How I keep fit: Cardio classes (when I have time). Running after my 8-year-old and my work keep me active.

A skill I wish I had: A good singing voice.

I am proudest of: Winning a gold medal at the Culinary Olympics in Germany in 2000.

What I miss about England: Being closer to my family.

What I like about the United States: That you are allowed to fail but can then succeed again and everyone embraces that.

My favorite place in the world: Switzerland, but I love where I am right now.

A challenge I'd like to take on: Take my Master Pastry Chef exam — no female chef has done this in the U.S. yet.

Contact Sunday News staff writer Suzanne Cassidy at scassidy@lnpnews.com.

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