



Artist bakes up sweet works of art



‘I HAVE TO THINK ABOUT WHAT WOULD LOOK GOOD ON A COOKIE OR WHAT IS POSSIBLE.’

**Christine McCrae
Owner, Lily's Cookies**

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Christine McCrae, owner of Lily's Cookies, shows off some of her fresh-baked products.

BY HEATHER RAY KARAM

With the stroke of a paintbrush, artist Christine McCrae turned blank canvases into works of art. But it would be McCrae's fascination with a sweeter medium that led the artist to trade in her paintbrushes for pastry bags.

As the owner of Lily's Cookies, McCrae is still completing masterpieces, but in an edible form. With her talent as an accomplished artist, McCrae has transferred her creativity into a gourmet cookie company that specializes in custom designed cookies for all occasions and themed events.

From baby strollers, to a menagerie of farm and zoo animals, to bite-sized replicas of the Alamo, McCrae says she continues to be challenged by her clients' imaginations.

"I have to think of what would look good on a cookie or what is possible," says McCrae. "I work with clients and get an idea and sometimes the clients are very creative and know exactly what they want for their occasion or they just let me design it."

With a staff of four part-time bakers, McCrae rolls out her one-of-a-kind treats from her commercial kitchen located at the Silo Restaurant — which was once the site of the old produce/restaurant venue known as Farm to Market. Lily's Cookies occupies what was the bakery space at the Farm to Market.

Sweet treats

The mini works of art consist of a basic shortbread cookie, she says. After the cookie is baked, each cookie is glazed with icing. With a steady hand, McCrae outlines the shape of the treats and then the real work begins in the decorating

stage. McCrae says the process to make the sweets can be labor intensive and can take her several weeks to complete large orders.

The cookies are made to order and a two dozen minimum is required. The cost of the cookies can run about \$1.50 to \$2.50 each, depending on the elaborate details and designs requested.

Lily's Cookies fan Barbara Gentry has ordered dozens of the sweets to give out at parties and other affairs.

"(McCrae) is so creative and her cookies are just so delicious," she says.

In the past, Gentry adds that McCrae made zoo animals and special holiday cookies for her events.

"She is so creative. You can just give her a thought or an idea and she can make anything."

The holidays are some of the busiest times of year for Lily's Cookies. McCrae recalls one of the biggest orders from last Christmas — some 2,000 cookies.

"That was a lot of work, but it was so much fun too," she says. "Just trying to keep track of the number of cookies we had finished was work, too."

The cookies are available in all shapes and sizes. And ever the artist, if McCrae doesn't have a cookie cutter in her collection to suit the event, she will make a template and create an original cutter.

For example, when McCrae was tapped by Nancy Scott Jones — owner of Nancy Scott Jones Public Relations — to make a special cookie for the anniversary celebrations of the Majestic and Empire theatres, McCrae designed a cookie cutter of the theatres' marquees.

"Her cookies are real works of art," says Scott Jones.

McCrae has made cookies for a number of public relations events Scott Jones has

handled.

"The fact that (McCrae) has such a high pedigree in relation to her art background, she has a real sense of color and preciseness," Scott Jones stresses. "She has really combined both her talents: art and baking."

Sweet success

■ **Lily's Cookies**
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Founded: October 2002

McCrae says she inherited her grandmother's penchant for cooking and entertaining. She has fond memories of the times spent with her grandmother in the kitchen cooking up a tasty treat for the family. The cookie company's name was actually inspired by a field of Lilies near her grandmother's home in Indiana.

McCrae grew up in San Antonio and later attended Pepperdine University, where she received a bachelor's of arts degree. Later she would finish her graduate work at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a master's in painting. McCrae had worked as an art gallery director in New York and Chicago, but later returned to San Antonio. It was at that time the artist began to experiment with baking.

She admits, though, she didn't give much thought at first to starting her own cookie business.

"I just started making them for friends and making them for parties, and it just kind of evolved," she says. "It (the business) just seemed to meld my interest in food and my love of art."

McCrae opened Lily's Cookies in October 2002. She secured the space at the Silo and word began to quickly spread about her talent for creating unique baked goods. She says she has not invested in any advertising to date.

"Sometimes people just see the cookies at an event and they ask, 'Where did you get those cookies?'" she says. "And from there, I have been fortunate that the orders just keep coming in."

She has received a number of accolades for Lily's Cookies recently. In November, McCrae won grand prize, best food overall and best dessert at the Blue Star Art Center's 10th Annual Arts and Eats Gala.

To that end, business has been sweet for the artist-turned-baker. Now beginning her third year of business, McCrae says cookie sales have doubled from last year, and she continues to garner business from both private party and corporate clients alike.

In the future, McCrae hopes to expand the reach of Lily's beyond San Antonio by opening an e-commerce avenue through her Web site.

Meanwhile, McCrae continues to work around-the-clock at the bakery, daily turning out new cookie batches and designs to satisfy her clients' sweet teeth.

She doesn't have much time these days to relish in her painting, she says, but the cookies have become a way for her to resume her love of art.

"When you paint you spend a lot of time just painting by yourself, whereas doing the cookies it is a lot of fun interacting with the people," McCrae says. "And, I still get to use my creativity as an artist."

