



Teen baking entrepreneur Gillian Bartell and her "Superman" cake.

This youngster's rolling in dough

By Risa C. Doherty

About a year and a half ago, Gillian Bartell of Old Westbury started her own business. This is unusual because most new entrepreneurs do not attend middle school.

At the tender young age of two, Gillian's culinary creativity was marked by an early-morning foray into the kitchen in response to her older brother's breakfast cravings. She threw together a concoction of bread, cream cheese and chocolate chips and her future was clear.

Baking has come naturally to Gillian, since she was about four. She has been fortunate to have three seasoned bakers in her family as mentors: two grandmothers and her mom. Her mother told me that Gillian has always loved to bake, and she could tell that it was not just a passing interest.

She signed up for baking classes at Michael's™, with a friend. But, when her friend dropped out, she was the only kid in a class of adults. "I didn't mind," she told me in a recent interview, shrugging her shoulders. She looks forward to taking classes to perfect her fondant and gum paste work.

Still, her creations are quite impressive even now. On her website, www.coolkid-chef.com, you can view a wide array of her

cake creations, in all sizes and shapes, each with its own colorful theme. I drooled over the Kit Kat Kake, which is a giant replica of the candy bar, with crimped sides to mimic the wrapper's edges, two layers of chocolate and a wafer layer in the middle. The originality of her ideas are highlighted in the design of the swimming pool cake, which includes sunbathers, chaise lounges and swimmers tossing beach balls; and the sleepover cake, which is a giant bed with eight girls under the covers, with their heads sticking out atop pillows on opposite ends of the cake. She claims that her favorite design, so far, was the clapperboard cake for a young actress, although she admitted that the three-dimensional globe cake with Hebrew and English lettering was a personally satisfying achievement.

When I asked Gillian who her "baking idol" was, she pointedly indicated that although she does not actually idolize anyone, she has been inspired by Duff Goldman, the star of TV's "Ace of Cakes." She likes

watching his show because "he's cool and interesting." She also said that if she ever had the opportunity to meet him, her jaw would drop and she would be speechless.

When the time came for her to select a charitable project to embark upon in conjunction with her upcoming bat mitzvah, she hesitated to undertake a project raising money for a good cause, although she saw the merit to such an endeavor. Instead, Gillian preferred to do something that reflected her interests and allowed her to add her own personal touch. Consequently, she decided to share her baking talent with elementary school children who attend an after school program, but would not normally be fortunate enough to enjoy a custom-decorated cake, like the ones which have become her specialty.

At the time of her first visit, the group of 30 youngsters got to celebrate those birthdays, which fall in the months of January or February, and they were delighted with the clown cake that she had baked for them. She plans to continue with this routine once a month.

Her advice for other kids who want to bake is that they should practice their techniques, "do it because you love it" and "take pride in your work."

Her advice for other kids who dream of starting their own business is to "go for

it" and to have a business plan. Her Dad reminded her that her practice of reinvesting in her business could also be sound advice for a young entrepreneur starting out. Gillian takes advantage of sales on baking supplies, to economically maintain her inventory. In addition, Gillian believes in donating a portion of her profits to charity, although she is still in the process of selecting the right one.

She explained to me that each time she receives a request for a cake, she goes through a set process in order to ensure that the cake delivered to the customer is the desired product. She completes a detailed order form, permitting the customer to select the shape, size, flavor and frosting colors. She then discusses the client's personal preferences, and often brainstorms with them to determine what should be on the cake to match the theme of their party or signify their hobby or interest. She is happy to include their favorite colors or particular objects they want on their cake. There are times customers have asked for her suggestions and rely on her expertise to create a cake which fits their occasion.

When asked what role she thinks cake baking will play in her future as an adult, Gillian was quick to answer that her future goal was to become a pastry chef.

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