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Sock Hop Grand Opening Celebration at SusieCakes in Lafayette

By Sophie Braccini



Susan 'Susie' Sarich in front of her new SusieCakes in Lafayette Photo Sophie Braccini

Once upon a time in Chicago, Grandma Madeline and Grandma Mildred had a granddaughter who spent most of her free time in both of their kitchens, baking with them. The little girl became so good at it that they nicknamed her 'Susie Cake.'

Fast forward 30 years. Susan (Susie) Sarich graduated from Cornell with a degree in hospitality, worked in that industry for 20 years, and then it hit her: She had carefully preserved her grandmothers' recipes; she wanted a business that would share the authentic American spirit of her grandmothers, so she opened SusieCakes six years ago with bakeries in San Francisco and the Los Angeles area.

On October 27, Sarich invites Lamorinda to the opening of her eighth store, which is in Lafayette at 3598 Mt Diablo Boulevard, next to Pizza Antica.

When she opened her first store, Sarich had a precise idea of what her baking and business models were going to be. "I wanted to bake almost Betty Crocker-esque desserts," she said during a 'hard hat' visit of her new store, "what your grandmother would have made, very mid-west, all-American cakes, where everything is straightforward and made from scratch."

Sarich looks for ingredients that are local and are of consistently high quality. Every month she gets 3,000 pounds of flour, 3,500 pounds of butter, 7,500 pounds of sugar (for batter and frosting), and 183,000 eggs from Chef's Warehouse in San Francisco and Los Angeles for the eight bakeries that prepare everything from scratch daily. What is not sold that day is given to local food banks.

"My other business objective was to give women a place to work and blossom in hospitality," says Sarich. "I've seen a lot of great women leave the industry because of night and holiday work. That's why we're closed on Sundays and we're open only from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. That was intentional from the start to build our brand."

In the bakery, painted in her signature 'Susie-blue' that reminds her of her grandmother's mixing bowl, clients will see about 10 bakers working behind a large glass window with a choice of cakes, cookies, pies, and bars. Custom-made cakes are a specialty.

About 60 percent of SusieCakes' business comes from custom-made cakes for all occasions. "In each store, we employ a full-time Celebration Specialist who works with guests to plan their custom cake design for their wedding, anniversary, graduation, or any special event," says Sarich. There are examples of cakes online, but clients have to come into the store to create one. Prices start at \$33 for a 6-inch round. Cakes are buttercream only.

"Our mission is 'Connecting Through Celebration,'" says Sarich. "If you're baking here for the people who live here, if you are also from the area, then you connect with the community." Giving back is also very important to Sarich. "Every year we give back \$150,000 of products to the community, school auctions, Girl Scouts, churches..." she says.

Sarich believes that people will come to experience the difference that 'back to basics' makes. "Life is so busy. What we offer is a simple place to just stop and relax with a friend or your child, sit down and have a cupcake, a cup of tea or coffee, and enjoy a simple moment of human interaction," she says.

The October 27 Sock Hop Grand Opening party will be from 1 to 4 p.m., with complimentary sweets. For information, visit SusieCakes.com.

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