

# It's an 'Inn' and It's Edible

BY KIMBERLY HERR

**EPHRATA** — There are wreaths at the windows, poinsettias by the door and a fire burning in the fireplace. It's a cozy scene, and, best of all, it's edible.

That's right. Everything is made with gingerbread, icing, candy, cereal or ice cream cones. It is the work of Tina Strepko, Ephrata.

Last year, Tina won best of show honors at the gingerbread house contest at the Historic Strasburg Inn, Strasburg. She is hoping to do the same this year.

The actual contest is Tuesday evening, but her entry must be there by Monday. When Tina arrives, she'll be able to see just how well she did in reconstructing her model. In fact, she will be able to compare it to the real thing, since what Tina made is a model of the Historic Strasburg Inn, complete with curtains, dormers and bricks.

"If I know that somebody is really going to like something, I'll go to great lengths," Tina explained. And she thinks the people of Historic Strasburg will like her gingerbread entry. When she mentioned the possibility of doing the reconstruction to one of the employees of the Inn last year, he replied, according to Tina, "I would have done backflips."

But before the finished product can cause that kind of excitement, there is a lot of work involved.

"Everything had to be edible," Tina said.

She used Cheerios cereal for the wreaths, an ice cream cone for a Christmas tree, clear toy candy for the window panes and gum candy for the tiny candles on the gingerbread tables. Tiny Chicklets were used for the panels on doors and shutters. Most everything else is made from gingerbread or icing. Tina estimated that she used some 70 odd pieces of gingerbread.

"I go very slowly and take my time with everything," Tina explained.

Tina has been planning to make the Historic Strasburg Inn model since last year, but the actual work did not begin until after Thanksgiving. How did she figure out what to use to create the different parts?

"You just start thinking about things," Tina said. "You keep your eyes open."

Tina explained that she makes cardboard patterns for many of the larger pieces. Then, while the gingerbread is still warm, she presses it onto the pattern and trims the excess gingerbread away.

"The worst part of the whole thing is having it (the gingerbread) all over the house," Tina laughed, explaining that she has a 17-month-old son who is interested in everything, especially her fragile gingerbread.

Tina explained that when she is busy with her gingerbread construction, her son, Daniel, often spends the day with her mother.



Coming down the final stretch - the contest is Tuesday - Tina finishes making the poinsettias that will be placed outside the gingerbread model. The flowers are made from icing and gingerbread.

When he is away, Tina spends about 12 hours every day on the house. When Daniel is not visiting Grandmother, Tina gets up at 5:30 a.m. so she can work before he wakes up. She often stays up until about 1 a.m., working after her son is in bed.

"I almost run on nervous energy," Tina laughed. "I don't even feel like eating. I just want to work on this thing."

Since this is the second year of competition for Tina, she knows what to expect.

"There's good competition over there," she said.

For last year's Lancaster County contest, Tina made a Victorian mansion, complete with a balcony and an "S" on the chimney for Strepko. "That house was really big," Tina said, explaining that last year the gingerbread houses were to be built on boards measuring 30x30. This year, the size has been reduced to 24x24.

Although she seems like a pro now, Tina has pictures - taken by husband, Barry, - of her first gingerbread house.

"When I look back on it, I think ooh," she chuckled.

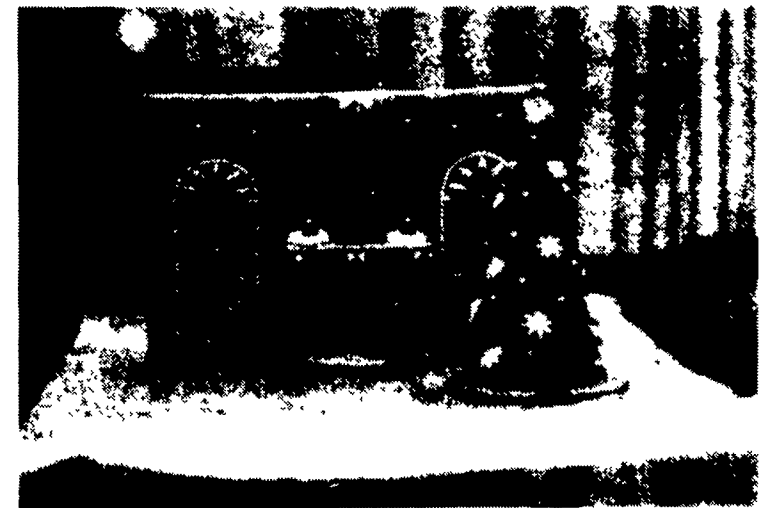
Tina's cake decorating interests were sparked when she took a class at the Brownstown Vo-Tech School. "My sister and I took the class sort of as a lark," Tina remembered.

But judging from the pictures Tina displayed of the cakes she has made, that lark has turned into talent.

"It's a hobby," Tina said. "If I



The dormers, wreaths and tiny tables, complete with candles will all be used in the gingerbread house. They are all made with gingerbread, candy or icing.



This Christmas tree and fireplace will be placed inside Tina's rendition of Historic Strasburg Inn. The tree is made with an ice cream cone and icing. The fireplace, complete with logs, is made from gingerbread. The wreaths were constructed from Lifesavers, while M&M's finish the tops of the doors.

didn't enjoy it, I couldn't do it. It's a challenge."

And, according to Tina, the Historic Strasburg Inn construction has been the most challenging so far. She has used

approximately four batches of gingerbread, and as of last Monday, the model was almost ready to be put together.

"All I know is it's going to be done, if I have to stay up all night," Tina said.



Tina Strepko puts some of the delicate detail on her gingerbread model of the Historic Strasburg Inn, which will be entered in the gingerbread house contest at the Inn.



This is one of the inside walls of Tina Strepko's gingerbread Historic Strasburg Inn. The detail on the inside walls is as exact as that on the outside walls. Tina's husband, Barry, took pictures of the Inn so Tina would be able to make an exact replica.

