

Cake Baker Raises Dough For 4-H

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York Co. Correspondent

YORK (York Co.)— If you want to sample one of Lois Rankin's cakes, be prepared to have your checkbook handy.

Lois, a 4-H parent and agriculture extension office staffer, has raised several thousand dollars for York County 4-H programs with her decorated cakes.

Her most recent creation of sweet dough, smothered in icing and ornamented with pictures of a steer, sheep and hog, was offered as the kickoff item for the York Fair's Junior Livestock Sale, held September 17 at the York Fairgrounds. By the time the chocolate and white sheet cake had been purchased, donated back, and resold—eight times—\$825 had been raised to send the county's state-winning meats judging team to national competition.

Auctioning off Lois' cakes at the junior livestock sales is a tradition that began in 1982—by accident.

"They wanted to have cake to serve at the beef and lamb roundup that year," recalls Lois. "Our daughter, Krista, volunteered me."

To serve the large crowd of buyers, 4-H'ers and parents, Lois arrived at the roundup with 11 sheet cakes. Some were simply decorated with trim in the 4-H colors of yellow and green, while others were a bit more elaborate.

"Someone decided we should give one to Weikert's, who hosted the auction; then they decided to auction another one," she adds. Lois does not remember the final bid price for that first cake, but believes it sold for less than \$100.

"The next year I did another

one, and then the next year, and then it got to be a tradition," she explains. When their son, Jason, joined the swine club, this supportive 4-H mother offered to decorate a cake for that roundup auction as well. In numerous cases, the final buyer of the cake has generously donated it to the 4-H members to eat and enjoy.

Though her cakes have generated enthusiastic bidding over the last dozen years, Lois vehemently insists that she is not a professional cake decorator. Nevertheless, she baked the cakes for the weddings of both their daughters, Krista and Karena. The first one, she says, was fairly plain; but she grew braver with the second attempt, and included a fountain layout.

A native of Punxsatawney, Lois and her husband, Bill farmed strawberries and vegetables for several years near Rochester, New York, while he was employed by the Curtice-Burns vegetable processing company. It was there that her interests in both cake decorating and 4-H took root.

"My neighbor tried to teach me cake decorating, but I was to "dumb" to learn," she chuckles. "And I took an extension course on making icing roses, but I just couldn't get them right." Frustrated with her class progress, Lois bought a few books on cake decorating and taught herself by practicing at home.

While developing her cake decorating skills, Lois was also branching out into another venture—4-H leadership. Though she did not "grow up" in 4-H, Lois admired and respected what the program had to offer youth. And

4-H leadership fit with her love of working with children and the elementary education degree she earned from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

In 1982, Bill was hired by Hanover Foods to oversee its extensive vegetable production operation. After getting settled into a new home in western York County, the Rankins immediately became active in the Thomasville Community 4-H Club. Both Krista and Karena raised breeding beef cattle. Cattle raising space at the Rankins was limited, so then Jason, the youngest, entered 4-H, he grew capons, and then market hogs.

"Neither Bill nor I had the background in those projects, so the kids had to learn skills, like fitting, by themselves. The 4-H program teaches responsibility. I don't know where else kids can learn the abilities and skills that they can in 4-H," says this devoted supporter of the agriculture extension youth program.

She credits their children's interests in attending college and career goals to 4-H; Krista is employed by Ciba-Geigy and Jason attends the York campus of Penn State.

With Jason about to "graduate" from 4-H, Lois Rankin's 4-H role as an active and supportive parent was drawing toward a close last year. Then, an extension office job opening thrust her into a new role, as a 4-H and ag science assistant.

"I assist," she quips, in summing up her responsibilities, primarily in extension and 4-H livestock programs, as well as public relations activities.

Lois also serves as coordinator of York County's Gypsy Moth Program, monitoring population



A tradition at York 4-H livestock roundup sales is the auctioning of a cake baked and decorated by Lois Rankin. The cake sales have generated thousands of dollars of support for special 4-H livestock programs.

levels of the destructive woodlot insect and working with areas determined to warrant spray applications for its control.

"Gypsy moth infestations are becoming a problem again," she says. "We're projecting them to be worse next year because of some

'hot spots' that are around, and so they're expected to spread. All the conditions appeared to be right for them this year in York County."

"Kids are my interest," she says adamantly, adding with a grin "And now I can stay in 4-H."

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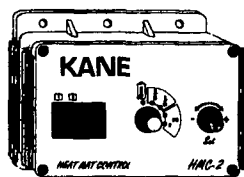
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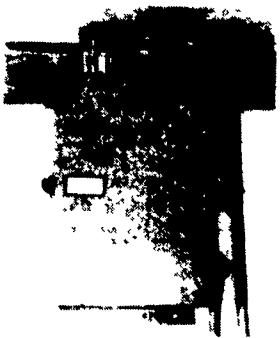


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