

# Judge A Cake By Its Cover? Of Course!

## Appearance Counts During Reading Fair Baking Contest

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Editor

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — Sometimes appearances aren't deceiving.

In the eyes of some judges, looks can count a great deal, especially in the world of baking.

"Appearance counts," said Marge Nester, retired home economics teacher from Muhlenberg High School.

Nester, who helped judge the baking contests Monday at the Reading Fair, said, "People eat with their eyes, not with their mouths."

Nester had some advice for would-be champion bakers: "If it doesn't look good, you might as well forget it."

Looking good, Nester noted, includes quick breads that don't sag in the middle or are cracked. It also includes cakes that are proportional and well presented to the eye. Bakers must follow directions — for a contest — to a T.

When it comes to contests, Reading proved no exception — several entries were disqualified because some cooks didn't follow the contest directives.

Nester taught at Muhlenberg for 18 years and judged many times at the Kutztown, Oley, and Reading fairs. She found recipes at the Hershey cake and cookie contest that didn't follow the directives carefully outlined: use Hershey chips and cocoa, because the contest sponsor spells them out.

Though heat and humidity took its toll on some entries, judges were looking at several factors, including appearance, flavor, and texture for the cake and cookies. For the quick breads and pies, overall appearance, crust color, flavor, texture, and shrinkage, in addition to bottom crust "doneness" and filling consistency and flavor, rated high.



Holding the winning Reading Fair baking contest entries are, from left, Fay Strickler, Berks County family and consumer science instructor, chocolate cake entry; and Reading Fair volunteers June Schuler, holding the winning apple pie; Linda Ernst, holding the quick bread winner; and Helen Readinger, holding the cookie contest winning entry. Photo by Andy Andrews, editor

Creativity was critical as well.

In all, there were 18 quick breads, 17 chocolate cakes, 13 cookie entries, and 15 pie entries. The Hershey Cocoa Classic cake contest specified the use of Hershey's cocoa. The baking chips cookie, brownie, or bar contest specified the use of Hershey's baking chips (any variety) and, if frosting is used, Hershey's cocoa must be used and listed in the recipe.

The cookie contest winner was Nicole Gruber, Slatedale, for a recipe for "Cherry Raspberry Chocolate Brownies" (all judges voted this tops in appearance for

the cookie entries). The chocolate cake winner was "Amanda's Chocolate Cake," also tops in appearance by all judges, exhibited by Amanda Kurtz, Emmaus. Amanda's sister, Sara, exhibited the quickbread winner, "Sweet Potato Bread." The top apple pie, "Yummy Apple Meringue Pie With Spiced Pecans," exhibited by Catherine Ache, was also rated number one in appearance by all judges.

All number ones tasted good, too.

Amanda Kurtz, 12, is the daughter of Robert and Sharon Kurtz, Emmaus. Robert noted his daughter has shown at various fairs, picking up ribbons at the Pennsylvania Fair recently. Amanda is in

the seventh grade at St. Anne's in Emmaus.

Amanda's sister, Sara, 8, is enrolled in third grade at St. Anne's.

Robert noted that part of the recipe for the chocolate cake included peanut butter, and that Amanda doesn't even like peanut butter.

"She can't stand it," said Amanda's mother, Sharon.

Sharon, a winner at various contests, suggested to Amanda to place crushed Reese's peanut butter cups on top of the cake to add flavor. Amanda used butter-flavored Crisco in the icing, which helped it maintain texture, even in the heat.

Amanda won the apple pie contest at the Pennsylvania Fair this year, noted her mom. "Amanda took her good old time," said Sharon, about six hours preparing the pie for competition — close to the time spent on the chocolate cake.

This was the first time Amanda submitted an entry for the Reading Fair contest and her first champion at Reading.

Sharon patiently supervised Sara's quick bread recipe entry. This was a "first" for the Kurtz family, submitting a quick bread entry at a fair.

Sharon won the winning chocolate cake at Allentown (a different recipe) and won the first place apple pie, she noted, at Farm Show this year.

Because of new contest rules, the recipes cannot be released to the general press because of competition at the Farm Show.

Contest judges also included Bruce Postem, assistant lifestyle editor for the Reading Eagle newspaper, and Andy Andrews, editor of Lancaster Farming.

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