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SUSIECAKES DELIGHTS WITH HOME-STYLE, ALL-AMERICAN DESSERTS

This beloved neighborhood bakery brings back classic confections—such as Layer Cakes, Home-Made Pudding, and Whoopie Pies—to satisfy every sweet tooth

(LOS ANGELES, CA; September 2009)—“Baked goods are hallmarks of happiness,” says Susan Sarich, founder of Los Angeles-based bakery SusieCakes. “Whether we’re celebrating a holiday or a specific event, we want them to be as unique as the day.” It’s this maxim—along with Sarich’s sweet tooth and nostalgia for the homemade desserts of her childhood—that inspired her to open SusieCakes. After the launch of the first SusieCakes in Los Angeles’s Brentwood neighborhood in 2006, customers began visiting from all over Southern California. Wanting to make her desserts more accessible to fans in other neighborhoods, Sarich opened

locations in Calabasas and Newport Beach, as well as a new SusieCakes in Manhattan Beach this past summer.

SusieCakes has its origins in Sarich's childhood in Chicago, where she would often arrive home from school to a warm kitchen filled with the smell of baking and treats fresh from the oven. Her two grandmothers were neighbors, and, between them, baked an entire repertoire of sweets—from Frosted Sugar Cookies to Whoopie Pies and Chocolate Layer Cakes. Sarich was captivated by what those desserts symbolized.

Influenced by her grandmothers in the kitchen, Sarich enrolled at Cornell University's School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration. Upon graduation, she spent five years working for Hyatt Hotels and Resorts, before joining Chicago's legendary House of Blues as special events manager in 1996. She then became the director of catering for Lettuce Entertain You's Mobil Five Star and AAA Five Diamond Award-winning restaurant, Everest Room. Ready for a new challenge, Sarich moved to Portland, OR, in 2001 and opened Zinc Bistrot as managing partner, which the *Zagat* guide named one of "America's Top Restaurants" in 2003 and 2004. Although she enjoyed running the restaurant, Sarich remained nostalgic for her grandmothers' homemade desserts and the sweet sentimentality they inspired, and decided that a neighborhood bakery would complement the family-friendly community of Brentwood.

Inspired by the seafoam-green mixing bowl one of her grandmothers used, Sarich painted the back wall of the bakery leading into the kitchen in the same soothing hue. She describes the interior of each SusieCakes as "retro, yet contemporary." The kitchen, in which all the treats are made daily from scratch by a team of skilled artisans, is visible to customers through partially frosted glass windows that mimic the layers of a cake. The pastel-shaded walls of each SusieCakes also feature framed vintage Betty Crocker advertisements from the 1950s, as well as black-and-white photographs of Sarich's family's childhood birthday parties. Custom lighting fixtures, designed to evoke cake pans, hang from an antique-style, patterned tin ceiling, and the floor tiles are patterned to look like a decorated cupcake.

Leading the revival of the classic bakery experience, SusieCakes makes all desserts on-site at each location. "I'm very intentional about that," Sarich says. "It's part of the neighborhood bakery experience: You smell things baking when you walk in, you see the bakers working. It's like the bakeries I grew up with."

Each SusieCakes offers a signature menu prepared by its own head baker who works with a team of skilled bakers. A “Cake Wish” station is also available for customers to consult with an on-site cake decorator to create something personalized and special. Small gestures, including the staff greeting regular customers by name, remembering their favorites, and following up on custom orders after an event to see how guests enjoyed the desserts, all make SusieCakes beloved community fixtures.

In regards to the menu, Sarich follows a less-is-better philosophy, using only a few high-quality ingredients to make a wide array of desserts. SusieCakes’ signatures are Old-Fashioned Layer Cakes, such as the decadent Cream Cheese-frosted Red Velvet Cake and Susie’s Celebration Cake, featuring six layers of Vanilla Cake rainbowed with Sugar Confetti and Retro-Blue Vanilla Frosting (slice, \$5.50 / 6-inch, \$33 / 9-inch, \$46). The bakery’s cupcakes are favorites because of the “frosting filling,” with the most popular flavor being Southern Red Velvet—which won the “Best Traditional” category of the 2009 Nesquik Cupcake Challenge in Los Angeles. Other flavors include Chocolate Chocolate, Luscious Lemon, Strawberry, Peanut Butter, Fluffy Coconut, and Sarich’s favorite, Vanilla with Pastel-Blue Vanilla Frosting (\$3 each).

Notable among the popular specialty items is SusieCakes’ version of the Whoopie Pie, the beloved New England dessert consisting of two Fudge Cookies sandwiching a Vanilla Butter-Cream filling (individual, \$5 / 6-inch, \$50 / 9-inch, \$85). Other perennial favorites include Seasonal Fruit Pies such as Apple or Cherry, as well as Cream Pies (\$8.95-24.95); Frosted Sugar Cookies with seasonal themes such as Pumpkins for Halloween or Conversation Hearts for Valentine’s Day, Lemon Bars, Classic Chocolate Brownies (all \$3 each); and Sour Cream Cheesecake (slice, \$4.95 / 8-inch, \$32). Homemade Pudding flavors include Banana, served with Vanilla Wafers; Butterscotch Toffee; and Chocolate (individual bowl, \$4.95 / large bowl that serves 6-10, \$24.95). SusieCakes also makes custom layer, stacked, and sheet cakes, as well as the signature Six-Layer “Cupcake” Cake (6-inch, \$59 / 9-inch, \$89 / 12-inch, \$179). Custom orders are accepted with advance notice.

In addition to these daily specialties, SusieCakes creates delicious wedding cakes—an item Sarich had not initially thought would be part of her bakeries. “I didn’t plan to get into the wedding business, because our cakes are very homespun,” she says. “We don’t use fondant or marzipan; our frostings are buttercream and cream cheese.” Customers wanting simple designs

and reasonable prices, however, kept pleading with Sarich, and she relented. Wedding options are very affordable, including cakes and cookies that can be decorated to match invitations for events leading up to the big day such as bachelorette parties and wedding showers. “Just because someone is getting married is no reason to inflate our prices,” she says. Cupcake trees and dessert tables are also available for special events, with consultations and tastings set up by prior appointment.

For home-baking enthusiasts who want to pick up a few professional techniques, or novices eager to learn the basics, the head baker at each SusieCakes location teaches hands-on classes in the kitchen. Cake and cupcake decorating, basic cake skills, and building icing flowers are among the offerings, and Sarich plans to expand SusieCakes’ class repertoire. Currently, classes hold 10-14 students. Customers can find more information about classes and seasonal specials by signing up to receive SusieCakes’ monthly e-newsletters.

SusieCakes is located in Brentwood (11708 San Vicente Blvd.; 310.442.2253); Calabasas (23653 Calabasas Rd.; 818.591.2223); Newport Beach (2043 Westcliff Dr. #104; 949.646.6881); and Manhattan Beach (3500 N. Sepulveda Blvd. #150; 310.303.3780). Store hours are Monday through Saturday 10 a.m.-7 p.m. For additional information, please see www.susiecakesla.com or visit www.facebook.com/SusieCakesBakery.

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