SLICE OF LIFE

**Gilbert (AZ) Bakers Win *Ace of Cakes* 100th Episode Celebration!**

**Cupcake Wars Invades the Valley of the Sun**

*Four talented cupcake bakers vie for the chance to have their sweets displayed at an anniversary party for* Ace of Cakes’ *100th episode. Cake-master Duff Goldman shares his expertise as a guest judge and contestants include: Jessica Cuff of The Coffee Shop (Gilbert, Ariz.), Michael Centimore of Cupcake Charlies (Mashpee, Mass.), Alyssa Magliato of The Perfect Circle Cupcakery (Orange, Calif.) and Erica Tucker of Sweet E’s Bake Shop (Los Angeles).*

Locals know it for the great food and great setting. Gilbert’s *The Coffee Shop* is set in the heart of Agritopia, a residential neighborhood anchored around a working urban farm. Now, TV audiences across the country now it for the cupcakes.

Winning cupcakes.

Sisters Jessica Cuff and Jenna Flowers, owners of The Coffee Shop together with parents Steve and Jeanne Flowers and Jessica’s husband, Curt, took their baking skills and showmanship to Hollywood for an anniversary edition of the Food Network’s *Cupcake Wars*--and came home champions. The experience elevated their operation to a new level, and turned them into local celebrities.

Their advice to others who might want to stand in the limelight: “Do it,” says Jessica without hesitation. “Try out for it. First of all, it’s a blast. And then, of course, there’s the prize money.”

And it’s been good for business. “We’ve always had an incredible business and really great customers. But this (TV exposure) has brought out even more people. It has encouraged folks to participate in our business, to see what we’re all about . They feel a part of what we’re doing. That’s good,” she said, “and profitable.” In addition to growth in in-store sales, the operation’s cupcakes are also sold at Nordstrom’s Chandler, AZ, location.

Jessica does offer fair warning to anyone who is considering a televised cooking competition: “It’s demanding. If you think it’s about food or cooking, it’s not. It’s television. When you get there you’re nervous or excited about cooking, but they (the TV hosts and producers) aren’t nervous or excited for you. They’re in the television business. They’re filming. If you can go there knowing that you’re there to help create a television show, you’re a step ahead of your competition.”

Ironically, cupcakes weren’t part of the planning when the family first conceived of The Coffee Shop. They wanted to focus on baked goods, sure, like cookies and brownies or cakes. Cinnamon rolls. Paired with great coffees, lattes and icy beverages. Breakfast items—burritos and omelettes—sandwiches and salads completed the menu and capitalized on the individual family member’s expertise. “My sister does a Whoopie—like a cream pie—that’s one of my all-time favorite things ever. They’re on the menu. And my mom has always been able to cook better than at most restaurants. Her recipes make up most of the menu.”

The restaurant opened in September 2007 and features homemade recipes and fresh ingredients, a roomy seating area that includes a farm-sized table where folks can sit and make new friends while eating, free wi-fi and an outdoor patio with plenty of cozy seating. It’s the family’s first restaurant venture, but Jessica is quick to point a common passion for baking and cooking that stretches way back. That, coupled with remarkable energy and a good business sense, has transformed their startup into an East Valley ‘must do.”

Quality ingredients and careful preparations are what keep people lining up for the latest cupcake creation or a **San Diegian** (an open-faced omelet with sour cream, mushroom, cheddar, bacon, chives, tomatoes, and feta cheese for $7.50) on weekday mornings. Shamrock Foods is proud to be a part of The Coffee Shop’s growth.

“I feel like I’ve known Mark (Starley, DSR) since the beginning,” Jessica said, “and he’s more than just our supplier. He’s part of our world. A friend. It feels good to have someone on your side like Mark. He always comes up with a better deal or a better idea, so I can have more variety on the menu and a better quality of ingredients.”

As for those championship cupcakes, the selection changes daily. Go to the website to stay up to date on what’s coming out of the oven. The site also tags the growing list of social media comments about the sisters, their cupcakes, the restaurant, and the variety of ways they stay connected to the community.

The Coffee Shop

Mon-Thu 6a-8p, Fri-Sat 6a-9p, Sun 8a-4p
3000 E Ray Rd, Gilbert Arizona
480-279-3144

www.thecoffeeshopaz.com

These cupcakes starred in Jessica and Jenna’s Cupcake Wars debut, which aired in July.

Vanilla Glam

Coconut

Lemon

Horchata

Cinnamon Roll

Birthday Cake

Peanut Butter Chocolate

Red Velvet

Rootbeer Float

Watermelon

Cookies & Cream

Banana Split

S’More Cupcake

Coffee & Cigarettes

Boston Cream (filled)

Peanut Butter & Jelly (filled)

Side bar taken from Cupcake Wars’ website

It’s cupcake vs. cupcake in Food Network’s tastiest competition yet! Each week on *Cupcake Wars*, four of the country’s top cupcake bakers face off in three elimination challenges until only one decorator remains. The sweet prize: $10,000 and the opportunity to showcase their cupcakes at the winning gig. Whether a special Ace of Cakes anniversary celebration, a star-studded magazine party or an A-list celebrity golf tournament, these *Cupcakes Wars* really heat up. Candace Nelson (owner of Sprinkles Cupcakes) and Florian Bellanger (chef and co-owner of online macaroon company MadMac) serve as permanent judges with a third rotating judge each week, and Justin Willman hosts.