

Lamar's Cake Wars

By Kenneth Perkins



Teacher Alyce Monroe and student Jose E. work on icing cupcakes during the annual Lamar Cake Wars.

One of the highlights for Alyce Monroe's Nutrition and Food Management class each year at Lamar High School is its famed Cake Wars – which includes both having students bake goodies and teachers jockey to become a judge of those cupcakes. Since each class period has its own competition, teachers and staff are needed to taste these treats in order to see who picks up the Golden and Silver Forks – or first and second place, respectively.

So imagine the competition just to become a judge.

“Let's just say we don't have a hard time getting judges for this,” Monroe said.

Students are judged on both taste and display, use of special ingredients, icing flavor, and overall presentation.

Groups of about four work together to make different cupcakes, getting some time to pre-

pare and plan, and then execute. They even have their own bakery names. A favorite: “For Goodness Cakes.” In a random drawing, groups drew yellow, white or chocolate cakes. One group baked chocolate cupcakes sprinkled with M&Ms while another offered up a white cake with vanilla pudding mix. A yellow cake had strawberries dangling on top.

“They must show and apply the knowledge of what they've learned over the year,” Monroe said. “I don't help much. It's all about what they know. It's about the science of baking as well as the creativity of creating a finished product.”

The class doesn't just delve into how to cook foods but also how to manage budgets and why hospitality is so vital to the food industry. A group leader welcomed the judges as they entered the classroom and would later explain their cupcakes.

“Some of these kids actually plan to go into the food business in some way,” Monroe said. “Others take the class because they love to eat and want to know how to do it all on their own.”

Monroe was thrilled to host this year's competition in a new, comfortable lab setting. While waiting for new kitchens to replace the old, cramped ones, classes were held in a conference room with a microwave and hot plate. The new kitchens and classrooms are spacious with enough elbowroom for students to create.

“They have been real troopers through all of this,” Monroe said. “It's hard enough that they have to stand for 90 minutes. They've done a fabulous job. We have had very few mishaps.”