

Food/Family/Home

Bake Better Carrot Cake & World May Come to Your Door

By MARYANN SORESE

Three years ago, Post Ave. resident Renee Allen labored in her tiny kitchen to produce enough cakes and pies to sell

within six upstate New York prison concessions she was supplying. Making numerous trips to the local Pathmark supermarket, Ms. Allen stocked up on

her ingredients and worked long into the night so her pastries would be fresh when they were delivered.

Today, Allen is the owner of Carrot Top Pastries on 214 St. and Broadway, and although she has narrowed her delicacies to only carrot cake and no longer sells exclusively to the inmates, she still maintains the freshness and homemade quality of her cakes. "I bake only to order and I never have a surplus," Allen said. "I can make sure my product is perfect, because it is the only one I have."

The cake which is Allen's speciality is made with shredded carrots and chopped walnuts and is glazed with a cream cheese frosting. Allen primarily sells wholesale to midtown delicatessens, restaurants and theater groups, but does take phone orders from the public. An eight ounce carrot nut loaf sells for wholesale at \$1.50 and retails at \$2.39. A nine inch bundt cake is \$8 wholesale and retails at \$1.50 per slice. She also bakes a one quarter inch and a half-inch sheet cake, but the price is determined by the weight and customer's

specifications.

Last May Allen, who is an attractive 31-year-old black woman, rented the storefront on 214 St. but the building needed a tremendous amount of work before it could

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be occupied. "This building had been a sweat shop," she said. "We had to put all new electrical wiring in. It took six months to do, and it was a lot of work."

The majority of the work, which amounted to \$30,000, was done by Allen's husband and their friends. The remainder was done by local contractors. The bakery is bright and airy, and has two large pizza style ovens and a long freezer-refrigerator compartment. Butcher block cabinets are used for storage and supplies. There is also space upstairs which will be used for offices after they have been renovated, Allen said.

In addition to the work and problems of renovating the Broad-

way building Allen had difficulty getting a small business loan. She had contacted Citibank for a \$15,000 loan, but was told they were not giving loans to new business because new business does not make any money.

Determined to open her store, Allen sold all her jewelry, the family's 17-foot boat, and traded in their car to get enough money together to begin renovating the building and buying equipment. "My partner (Allen's husband) and I have invested all our money in this business," she said.

At present, Allen is busy promoting her product in midtown restaurants like Proof of the Pudding and department stores such as Bloomingdale's and Macy's. She is featuring a rabbit shaped carrot cake for Easter and hopes to set up a small booth in the well-known Manhattan department stores to take orders. "I will only sell it where I myself would go to shop or eat. My cakes are quality products and have to be sold in quality stores," Allen said. "We hope to get so well known that people will come from everywhere to try my product."



Renee Allen, owner of Carrot Top Pastries, slides rack of carrot cakes into freezer compartment. H•I Photo by J. Suarez.