

LIFE



**Reese's Cup 9" Cheesecake:** Vanilla bean cheesecake topped with chocolate and peanut butter ganache, chocolate buttercream and a Reese's Cup candy with chocolate curls. **Messy Aprons & Company** is located at 14300 Pearl Road in Strongsville *Yadi Rodriguez, cleveland.com*

## READERS POLL BEST CHEESECAKE

## Three standout bakeries share the stories behind their sweet success

*Behind all three businesses are stories of tradition, creativity and passion — one slice at a time.*

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Cheesecake may be the star on the plate, but behind every slice is a story — and in Northeast Ohio, those stories are just as rich as the dessert itself.

From a grandmother's kitchen to pandemic experimentation to recipes passed down for generations, the top three finishers in [cleveland.com](http://cleveland.com) and The Plain Dealer's search for the Best Cheesecake reveal that great baking is about more than ingredients.

It's about memory, creativity and a whole lot of heart.

### NO. 1 MESSY APRONS & CO., STRONGSVILLE

At Messy Aprons & Co., the top-ranked cheesecake in Northeast Ohio is rooted in something deeply personal.

For owner Melissa Simon, baking began alongside her grandmother, apron tied tight, and lessons learned in the kitchen. After her grandmother's passing, cheesecake became a form of grief therapy — something that slowly grew into a business built on love, memory and a closely guarded recipe.

Today, Messy Aprons produces dozens of cheesecakes each week, along with thousands of slices and minis.

Although plain remains a bestseller, nearly 200 flavors rotate through the menu — from classic vanilla bean to creative combinations like lavender buttercream and Dubai-inspired pistachio chocolate.

Despite the growth, the philosophy remains simple: fresh ingredients, careful technique and a commitment to quality. Cheesecakes are water-baked for a creamy texture, and toppings like fresh berries are added the day they're served.

Behind it all is a story that began with family — and continues with every cheesecake that leaves the kitchen.

### NO. 2 DS CAKES AND SWEET CAFÉ, NEWBURY

At DS Cakes and Sweet Café, second place belongs to a cheesecake that doesn't try to stand out — and that's exactly why it does.

Owner Diane Schneider's Polish-style cheesecake is simple, light and rooted in tradition. The recipe dates to the 1800s and reflects a time when desserts didn't need elaborate toppings to make an impression.

Served as a humble bar with a thin layer of sour cream, it's a cheesecake built on balance rather than excess — no chocolate drizzle, no fruit topping, just flavor that speaks for itself.

For many customers, it's more than dessert — it's nostalgia.

It's a reminder of something homemade, familiar and comforting.

That same philosophy extends throughout the café, where Schneider has built a business focused on quality ingredients and classic baking techniques. It's a place where tradition isn't reinvented — it's preserved.

### NO. 3 MOMMA'S CHEESECAKE KITCHEN, WILLOUGHBY

Third place tells a very different story — one born out of curiosity and a little bit of trial and error.

Sam Lovick never planned to start a cheesecake business. In fact, before the pandemic, she had never made one.

But like many home bakers during that time, she decided to try. What started as a Pinterest recipe quickly turned into something more. Batch after batch, she tweaked flavors, tested ideas and developed a style all her own.

Today, Momma's Cheesecake Kitchen produces about 18 cheesecakes a week, with roughly 150 flavor variations ranging from traditional to bold. Think apple pie, bourbon bacon, margarita and even Watermelon Sour Patch Kids.

Lovick's process is less about precision and more about creativity — a "chaotic" approach, as she describes it, where ideas take shape in her head before becoming reality in the kitchen.

Operating out of her home, she has built a loyal following through local restaurants and custom orders, proving that sometimes the best ideas start with simply wanting to try something new.

Momma's Cheesecake Kitchen in Willoughby

Together, these three bakeries showcase the range of what cheesecake can be — from deeply personal to beautifully simple to wildly creative.

Whether you're drawn to tradition, innovation or something in between, one thing is clear: in Northeast Ohio, there's no shortage of ways to enjoy a perfect slice.

We take a deep dive into each of your winners inside beginning on **D2**.

### THE TOP 10 IN OUR READERS POLL

In alphabetical order, here were the Top 10 best cheesecake spots in our readers poll:

**Butter and Bloom Bakery:** 915 Main Street, Grafton

**Clementine's:** 8092 Columbia Road, Olmsted Falls

**Dolce at the Strand:** 123 Broad St., Wadsworth

**DS Cakes:** 11130 Kinsman Road, Newbury

**Larder Delicatessen and Bakery:** 1455 W. 29th St., Cleveland

**Mavalee's Bake Shop:** 106 Cherry Ave., Chardon

**Messy Aprons & Co.:** 14300 Pearl Road, Strongsville

**Momma's Cheesecake Kitchen:** Willoughby

**Slices Fabulous Cakes:** 4190 Pearl Road, Cleveland

**Sophie La Gourmande:** 2277 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights