

LIFE



Messy Aprons & Company owner Melissa Simon. Photos by Yadi Rodriguez, cleveland.com

READERS POLL FIRST PLACE

Strongsville baker turned grief into the best cheesecake in Northeast Ohio

Messy Aprons & Co. began with a grandmother's secret recipe. Now it's a full-scale operation powered by family.

Paris Wolfe pwolfe@cleveland.com
Yadi Rodriguez yrodriguez@cleveland.com

Long before Messy Aprons & Co. became one of the most talked-about bakeries in Strongsville — and before it earned the title of Best Cheesecake in Northeast Ohio from cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer — Melissa Simon was a kid in the kitchen, apron tied tight, baking beside her grandmother Betty Gibson.

"We always had to have aprons," Simon said.

Those moments became the foundation for everything that followed. Baking wasn't just about food — it was connection. Even years later, when her grandmother began losing her memory, Simon held on to those rituals.

In fact, as the years went on, she had a cheesecake prepared to quietly swap out if Grandma brought something less than perfect to a family gathering. That way no one, especially Grandma, would know anything was amiss.

When her grandmother passed away in 2012, the loss changed Simon's life in more ways than she anticipated.

"I started baking cheesecake as grief therapy," she said. That grew into cheesecakes made at home and sold to local restaurants and for private events.

Word spread. Demand grew.

What began as something deeply personal slowly turned into something much bigger. Eventually, a brick-and-mortar location was established four years ago.

Today, Messy Aprons is a full-scale operation powered by family and fueled by that same original recipe. Still a "closely guarded secret," it is known only to Simon and her husband.

They use it for large cheesecakes and mini cheesecakes, both available to order and for walk-in customers.

Messy Aprons' menu reflects both tradition and the best-seller, but there are nearly 200 flavors in rotation. Among them are strawberry crunch, triple berry, cookie dough, pistachio, orange creamsicle, buckeye, lavender buttercream, key lime, Snickers and so much more.



Cookie Dough cheesecake is one of the nearly 200 flavors in rotation.



Lavender mini cheesecake. Flavors rotate every two weeks based on what customers respond to.



Can't commit to just one? Cheesecake minis let you mix, match and enjoy a little bit of everything.

"We're always trying to add things," said Simon, noting that minis and cheesecake slices lead sales.

Flavors continue expanding based on trends.

"We watch what happens in Australia

to see what's coming our way," Simon revealed. Some of the newer trends have been Biscoff cookie butter and Dubai-inspired pistachio chocolate cheesecake.

Despite successes, Simon hasn't rushed to expand. In fact, she wasn't even think-

ing of it when she posted an April Fool's Day joke about a second location.

The "joke" drew more than 450 eager responses from people hoping it was real. That may have encouraged growth, but for now, Simon is staying put.

Social media has changed her business in another way. People far and wide are learning about the cheesecakes from TikTok and visiting from everywhere. They're driving from Columbus and West Virginia or stopping in on their way to the airport.

Shipping, though, makes her uneasy.

"We put so much love into a cheesecake that it stresses me out to see how it would travel," she said.

That attention to detail defines everything done at Messy Aprons. Cheesecakes are water-baked for a soft, creamy texture. Fresh berries are added the morning of.

"We're doing everything at the last minute," she says. "We don't freeze anything."

The work is constant. Messy Aprons makes 75 to 80 cheesecakes a week for restaurants, as well as thousands of minis and slices.

Flavors rotate frequently — minis every two weeks, slices weekly — based on what customers respond to. Some combinations surprise her, like cherry and Snickers. Others remain timeless, like vanilla bean.

As Mother's Day approaches, orders are piling up.

Slice Club regulars are filling their cards — buy 10, get one free. Discounts are offered to seniors, military members, and first responders.

And the ovens keep going.

Before customers leave, Melissa shares one small but important tip: "Let your cheesecake sit out 20 minutes before serving."

It's a simple instruction, rooted in experience. Just like everything else at Messy Aprons.

Beyond cheesecake, the shop offers cupcakes, cookies, gluten-free cheesecakes and more. A local baker supplies macarons, something that Messy Apron can't bake because the kitchen has too much humidity.

Community remains central. Messy Apron partners with other small businesses to fill a gift shop with candles, jewelry and more.

Beneath the growth and the award-winning recognition, the heart of it all traces back to a grandmother, an apron and a recipe that never really changed.

Messy Aprons & Company is at 14300 Pearl Road in Strongsville; 440-879-1200. It is closed Sunday and Monday.