

Meet the Chef: Alice Lombardi/Bean Counter

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Alice Lombardi is an award-winning pastry chef and highly successful business owner.

She opened and established the Bean Counter Coffee Bar, 113 Highland St., Worcester, in 2001; the Bean Counter Bakery, Route 9, Shrewsbury in 2007 “to meet increasing demand for wedding cakes and gluten-free cakes/bakery treats;” and Café Noir, 307 Grafton St., Shrewsbury (formerly Black Diamond Coffee) in 2008. In 2012, Lombardi renovated the Highland Street store.

“We have now outgrown our Shrewsbury bakery and plan to open a 10,000-square-foot bakery next year in Worcester, which will be our primary bakery and fourth retail store,” said Lombardi.

She said she grew up in a family where “we made everything from scratch.” Her fondest memories growing up was watching and helping her grandmother cook and bake family meals, she said.

Lombardi graduated from Columbia University School of Engineering and Applied Sciences with a B.S. degree in industrial engineering. She met and married her “college sweetheart.” The couple have two children.

Lombardi said when her children were young, she was a stay-at-home mom who never stopped cooking and baking. “I found it to be therapeutic,” she said. “I especially love to bake because baking is a science and allows the chef to be extremely creative. There is no limit with what you can do with just a few simple ingredients.”

When a friend suggested that she make desserts for restaurants, Lombardi turned her hobby of baking treats in her basement for her neighborhood’s “Mom’s coffee hours” into a business that employs nearly 50, including a “talented” team of the “best” professional pastry chefs, bakers and cake decorators. She credits her industrial engineering discipline and experience in process management and efficiency with part of her success in operating a bakery business.

Lombardi is extremely passionate about what she does. She strongly supports community by giving back, she said. Through her corporate social responsibility programs and community initiatives, she donates (gift cards, cakes, products, etc.) to local charities, schools, churches, senior centers/housing, community fundraisers, homeless organizations, fire and police departments, and more.

For the PBS program, “This Old House,” Bean Counter Bakery donated the iconic “red barn,” which was handcrafted from gingerbread. The house was used in the show’s holiday promotions.

The Bean Counter’s wedding cakes have won consecutive annual awards from the Knot and WeddingWire since 2010.

The bakery will participate in the annual Central Massachusetts March of Dimes Signature Chefs Auction Oct. 20 at Mechanics Hall in Worcester. It also is a sponsor of the Lakeway Business District Association in Shrewsbury.

The business is open daily (closed only on Thanksgiving and Christmas) and offers a full line of gluten-free cakes/bakery treats as well as vegan, dairy-free and gluten-free vegan cakes, cookies and cupcakes. Visit www.beancounterbakery.com.

1. What’s your favorite cheap eat?

Fried chicken.

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2. Who were your biggest influences?

Julia Child and my grandmother.

3. What’s your all-time most memorable meal?

A tie: Cioppino in San Francisco’s Alloto Restaurant on Fisherman’s Wharf and Spaghetti alle Vongole at Alfredo Ristorante in Rome

4. What ingredient are you obsessed with?

Honey.

5. What’s your guilty food pleasure?

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A tie: Homemade soft pretzel and dirty martini with Ketel One.

6. What's the kitchen tool you can't do without?

Mixer.

7. What food trend has outlived its welcome, and any idea of what's the next trend in the food world?

All foods made with industrial processed trans-fat ingredients (such as partially hydrogenated oils) found in nondairy whipped cream, shortening, margarine, etc., will not only be outlived but will be banned by the FDA. So, wholesome and all-natural butter, heavy cream, cream cheese, sour cream, etc., will make a comeback (fortunately, our bakery has always used these ingredients!)

8. What would you be doing if you weren't a chef?

Industrial engineer.

9. What's your favorite meal to make at home?

Roast leg of American lamb and sour cherry pie for dessert.

10. What's the strangest thing in your fridge at home?

Fish paste in a tube.

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