

# Out-of-the-box whoopie pies

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## Contest creates tasty twists on the Maine classic

On one particularly long winter day, several months after an inspiring day at the Maine Whoopie Pie Festival in Dover-Foxcroft, the bakers at Grant's Bakery in Lewiston had had enough. Following a rather serendipitous incident involving a whoopie pie and a bowl of melted chocolate, they decided that the best way to "whoop" the cabin fever out of central Maine would be to host a contest, aptly called: "Let's Make Whoopie."

The challenge: "Create a new and original whoopie pie – a delicious combination of flavors – and a name" to add to Grant's annual Whoopie Pie Club calendar.

Contestants were asked to suggest creative and original flavor combinations that were not already part of the bakery's list of offerings. Contestants were asked NOT to submit actual recipes, in order to make the contest about the combination of flavors and not about each contestant's baking skills. The result opened the contest up to anyone with taste buds and a willingness to dream sweetly.

Specifically, "we asked contestants to supply us with a name, cake flavor, filling flavor and a note regarding whatever extras they might add – like roll it in chocolate chips, crushed walnuts or shaved coconut, or dip it in chocolate," said Kari Grant-Gagnon, sales and marketing director.

How many ways can a Mainer make whoopie? Apparently, lots. The bakery received 40 different and enticing entries from as far away as Bangor. "It's been very exciting," said Grant-Gagnon, who, with other Grant's staff and independent judges, then sat down and let their imaginations consider the sweet options.

Without actually baking any of the submissions, the staff came up with three award winners, which they announced recently. Last Tuesday, bakery staff made batches of the three winning whoopie pies and brought the winners together at the bakery for the reveal and tastings.

So dear friends and fellow whoopie pie lovers, toss out your preconceived notions of what makes a great whoopie pie and consider the possibilities:

The first award was given to the whoopie pie that most impressed baker Patsy Paquette, hence the Patsy's Choice Award. Patsy's selection was based on: feasibility of production; availability of ingredients; creativity/originality of flavors; and creativity/originality of name, all equally weighted.

The winning whoopie, Mocha Madness, was submitted by Joline Laurendeau of Lewiston, and features a traditional chocolate cake with a nontraditional mocha and chocolate chip filling, giving texture and an exciting zing to the traditional whoopie pie.

Said Laurendeau of her entry, which she conceived of but never made: "I just love mocha and chocolate. . . . They go hand in hand, and I thought it would be a fun combination."

Although Laurendeau, who said she is not much of a baker herself, was looking forward to tasting her Mocha Madness whoopie idea, she admitted, "I like to try the flavored (whoopie pies) once in a while, but I always go back to the original."

The second winning whoopie was selected by the dozen or so employees of Grant's Bakery. The Employees Choice Award was based on the same criteria as the first award, but it had a lot more mouths to impress.

The winning entry was a whoopie called Summertime Strawberry. Submitted by Wayne Hull of Litchfield, Summertime Strawberry is a strawberry cake with a sour lemon filling.

Hull chose Summertime Strawberry as his submission because "it reminded me of strawberry lemonade, a summertime treat" straight from his childhood.

"I've been baking for five years," said Hull, although he acknowledged he hasn't made his award-winning whoopie pie – but he's planning on it.

What is Hull's favorite whoopie pie to date? "I like an orange cream whoopie, and a maple flavored (one)," but, he said, "a Key lime (whoopie pie) also sounds yummy."

And, speaking of orange . . . the winner of the third and last award in the competition was judged solely on the creativity of its flavor and name — "something unusual and not already offered in the store," said Grant-Gagnon. The highly coveted Most Creative Award, which was selected by a small panel of judges drawn from the Lewiston-Auburn community, is called Orange Creamsicle.

Submitted by Lewiston resident Doreen Valecko, the whoopie pie features a smooth vanilla filling sandwiched by orange-flavored cakes.

Like Hull, Valecko's inspiration for Orange Creamsicle was drawn from her childhood. "When I was a little girl I liked the old-fashioned Creamsicles," she said. "I also used to like the orange cake mixes that were available

during the '70s, and people are making Creamsicle drinks and other things these days, so I thought it would make a nice flavor for a whoopie pie.”

Like Laurendeau, Valecko said she’s not a baker and hadn't tried her award-winning entry before submitting it, “but I’ve eaten a lot of whoopie pies in my day.” Her favorite flavor is the classic, but once in a while she’s been known to enjoy a pumpkin whoopie pie. However, now that she’s come up with her own attention-getting flavor, she says, “that might change.”

As prizes, each of the three winners got a \$25 gift certificate to Grant’s Bakery, a dozen of their award-winning whoopie pies prepared by the bakers at Grant's, and their winning whoopie pies will be featured for sale in the store in the future and in the bakery's “Whoopie Club” calendar, which focuses on a unique and often seasonal whoopie pie every month.

Although none of the winners have attended the Maine Whoopie Pie Festival, which last year drew more than 5,000 whoopie pie fanatics, their winning whoopies will also be part of the Grant’s Bakery repertoire at this year’s festival, which is scheduled for June 28.

Other entries in the “Let’s Make Whoopie” contest that received a generous nod from the judges included “Somebunny’s Dream,” a whoopie featuring carrot cakes and a cream cheese-flavored filling; “Root Beer Float,” a root beer-flavored cake with a vanilla cream filling; and “Caribbean Paradise,” made with a coconut-vanilla filling sandwiched between two vanilla cakes baked with chunks of pineapple and mango.

## Whoopie in your future

Here are recipes from Grant's Bakery so you can make your own versions of the award winners.

### Basic white filling

2 cups marshmallow creme (can use Fluff or other prepared marshmallow)

1 1/4 cups vegetable shortening

1/4 stick butter (softened)

1 1/2 cups confectioner's sugar

1 tablespoon vanilla

1/2 teaspoon salt

\* To prepare the filling for the Summertime Strawberry whoopie pies:

Add lemon extract, to taste. If you like a lot, add more confectioner's sugar to achieve the right consistency.

\* To prepare the filling for the Mocha Madness whoopie pies:

Purchase coffee syrup at the grocery store or create your own coffee syrup using instant coffee and a small amount of water. Add to the cream filling, to taste (how much you add is determined by how strong you like your coffee). If you use a lot, add more confectioner's sugar to achieve the right consistency. Mix in desired amount of mini chocolate chips.

Here's a link to another filling recipe if you'd like to use all butter and no shortening: <http://www.wilton.com/recipe/whoopie-pie-filling>

### **The cakes**

\* For Orange Creamsicle whoopie pies:

Use your favorite white cake recipe or boxed mix, but replace the water in the recipe with orange soda. Or add orange extract to taste.

\* For Summertime Strawberry whoopie pies:

Use your favorite strawberry cake recipe or boxed mix. Or use your favorite white cake recipe and add strawberry extract to taste.

\* For Mocha Madness whoopie pies:

Use your favorite chocolate cake recipe or boxed mix.

### **Preparation:**

Prepare your cakes as directed. Using a cookie scoop or a regular spoon, place "cookie-sized scoops" of cake mix onto an ungreased cookie sheet or a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper until you've used your entire mix. The size of the scoop depends on the size of the whoopie pie you want to make. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 to 13 minutes, for traditional-sized pies. Less for smaller pies. Make sure to adjust your bake time according to size. Remember it's better to under bake and put back into the oven for extra time than it is to over bake!

While baking the cakes, prepare your filling.

Once the cakes are cooled, take one, layer filling over the flat side and sandwich with another cake. Repeat. Enjoy!