

This 11-year-old has designs on a career as a pastry chef

By Andrea Pyenson
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BROOKLINE — Sarah Silvestri is an artist. Just give her icing and fondant and watch a world unfold. Her holiday cake looked like a winter wonderland, with gingerbread houses, trees, and gingerfolks, all trimmed with red, white, and green icing. The baker has just turned 11.

Sarah, who hopes to be a professional pastry chef, has been making cakes and cookies since she was 6. She used to watch her mother, Pam DiPiro, a physician, turning out celebration confections for her and her siblings, Stevie, 9, and Mia, 6, in whatever design they chose. "I liked to watch Mommy make my birthday cakes," Sarah says. "One day she was on call and I asked Dad if I could make a cake. I made the cake and piped 'Mom' in frosting."

The budding pastry chef uses family recipes or makes up her own for the chocolate, vanilla, carrot, and banana cakes that serve as her canvases. As for her designs, she says. "I don't usually make the same cake twice." She is largely self-taught. She did take one class at Party Favors, the Brookline institution known for its fabulous-looking and delicious special event cakes and cupcakes; her parents won the class at an auction. "That was really fun," Sarah says. And she works some Sundays at Sugar bakery in West Roxbury, where she helps fill cannoli shells, fills and decorates cupcakes, and packages bread.

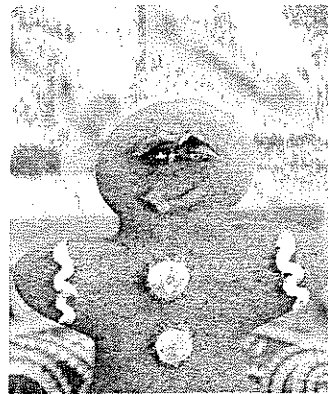
Remarkably poised, the fifth-grader is creative about her cakes. She replicated her father's Boston Marathon jersey last April, made a Barbie cake for her sister's preschool graduation, assembled a tiered cake with 12 fondant roses for her aunt's wedding; and baked a golf-themed birthday cake for her grandfather, who loves the sport. The cake showed more sand than grass (reflecting his proclivity to hit the ball off the green). "My Grandma helped me design the cake," she says.

Her talents have extended to the neighborhood. She's the go-to baker for birthdays, graduations, team celebrations, even town



PHOTOS BY JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sarah Silvestri finishes a cake she made from scratch and decorated herself. The 11-year-old has become the go-to baker for neighborhood birthdays and other celebrations.



events. She recently made 275 cookies for Brookline's "1st Light" holiday celebration, and helped the Volcanoes soccer team celebrate with a brightly frosted

mound of cake spewing "lava." Her skills include candy and mold-ed chocolates.

About one or two requests a month come in; Sarah never asks for payment, but people outside the family usually do pay for special orders.

The aspiring chef cooks, too. When her babysitter's mother was visiting from Mexico, Sarah prepared a five-course dinner that included a mango salsa she had seen on the Food Network. And while her next door neighbors are living through a kitchen renovation, they know they can count on Sarah for an occasional home-cooked meal. But baking is her passion.

It should lead to a sweet future.