

BLOOMINGDALE

Woman develops (gingerbread) cottage industry

Project she started for her daughters now local tradition

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Most folks in New Jersey are ready to hit the shopping malls on the day after Thanksgiving. But not Teresa Hock. A 20-year resident of Bloomingdale, Hock heads to the supermarket knowing exactly what she needs. Her cart is filled with 30 pounds of flour, 180 pounds of molasses, nine pounds of margarine, three dozen eggs and over 24 pounds of confectioner's sugar. This is just the start of preparation for the Annual Hock Gingerbread Workshop.

"We prepare gingerbread for 55 houses (220 squares and 300 people). There are six pieces of gingerbread to work with: four for each side of the house and two for the peak of the roof. A smooth running workshop requires a lot of leg work."

Teresa Hock
Gingerbread Cottage Workshop Industrialist

An avid baker and cake decorator, Hock has always enjoyed making yummy creations for her husband John and daughters, Colleen and Holly. When the girls were young, she searched for new and different projects to do with them.

In 1991, she found a Gingerbread House cookie cutter kit made by Wilton Industries.

Though such houses are typically made with graham crackers, Hock decided to bake the gingerbread.

Starting out small, a few neighbors came over before the holidays to make gingerbread people and houses. Hock instructed the kids to bring nothing but their imaginations. She supplied the gingerbread and the trimming - M&Ms, Neco



Teresa Hock of Bloomingdale, who began making gingerbread houses for her daughters, now annually teaches others the craft of baking gingerbread and assembling the delectable dwellings.

wafers, Snowcaps, pretzels, candy canes and mini-marshmallows. Fifteen years later, a tradition was born. On Dec. 15, 2007, over 50 guests (both repeaters and new "bakers") will come to the Hocks' to make some gingerbread magic.

Three weeks before the event, Hock and her mom, Dolores Inglesse, spend close to 17 hours in her small kitchen mixing ingredients and baking gingerbread. Once cooled, the pieces are separated to make "kits."

"We prepare gingerbread for 55 houses (220 squares and 300 people)," Hock explains. "There are six pieces of gingerbread to work with: four for each side of the house and two for the peak of the roof." A smooth running workshop requires a lot of leg work.

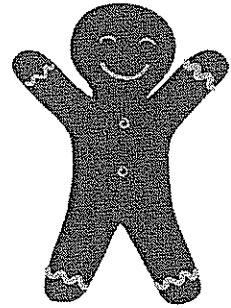
The icing, which provides the "glue" for the house, is not done ahead of time.

"We save the icing for the day of the workshop," she said. "It can't be made too early because it would harden."

Meringue powder, confectioner's sugar and water are mixed



At the 2006 annual gingerbread house workshop run by Bloomingdale's Teresa Hock (l to r) --- Adriana Inglesse of Hawthorne, Emily Roos of Ridgewood, and Jenna Gilby of Washington,



The finished product.

together to make a royal icing.

"Once a house is ready to be built, the semi-wet icing is applied to the edges of the walls and they are pressed together. The icing becomes hard - holding the walls and peak of the roof together."

Some give gingerbread creations as gifts. Others donate their houses to hospitals, nursing homes and children's charities, and a few insist on keeping them.

"Personalization is important. I buy enough for everyone to cover a house. Some repeaters arrive with their own trimmings."

Hock learns a lot about personalities by watching how candy and pretzels are used to decorate. Creativity is reflected in the finished product.

After building and decorating - a two to three hour process - the Hock family presents awards: "Best Use of Chocolate," "Best Beginner House" or "Most Creative Use of Icing."

"There are teenagers - my daughters' friends, who I don't see all year," she said. Older, attending college or working full-time, they're involved in their own lives. But Hock believes that kids recognize the sentiment in giving a handmade gift. It replaces the allure of the department store.

Hock's oldest daughter, Colleen, lives in Oklahoma.

"If she weren't coming home for Christmas, she'd come home just to make her gingerbread house," Hock said.

It's a fun and festive gathering, from decorating to cleanup. Each masterpiece is wrapped carefully to withstand the drive home.

"I've been sending a house to my brother in Florida for the past 10 years. Packed in a very sturdy box, not one has broken," she said. Holiday shopping for a large family is costly.

"I make 15 houses to give as gifts. Not only do people love them," she said, "they've come to expect them."

At the Maimonides Cancer Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., where Hock commutes daily for work, she donates a house as a raffle item for the annual children's holiday party.

Teresa and John are proud that the workshop has evolved. What began as "something to do" to entertain her young girls, the Annual Hock Gingerbread Workshop has become a meaningful and treasured holiday happening in Bloomingdale.

