

Gourmet dreams

Music education major hits high note with Frostings Bake Shop

BY KELLEY FREUND ('07)

Matt Fraker ('03) always has food on his mind. "I come from a family whose primary means for nurturing is through food. In my family, we're already dreaming about and planning dinner while we're eating breakfast," says Fraker.

Whether thinking about dinner preparations, remembering a meal he experienced at a restaurant or creating something in his own kitchen, food is Fraker's passion.

The owner of Frostings Bake Shop in Glen Allen, Va., Fraker gained national fame when he competed on the Food Network's *Cupcake Wars* in January 2012.

At JMU, Fraker thought his passion for music would become a career. One of the founding members of the all-male *a cappella* group Exit 245, Fraker graduated with a degree in music education and taught chorus at the middle school and high school levels for five years. Although he found the job rewarding, after awhile he was ready for a change. "I enjoy working with people and following my passion," says Fraker.

During a 2008 weekend with friends in New York City, Fraker was introduced to gourmet cupcakes. "It was intriguing to see long lines of customers waiting outside

a bakery to buy cupcakes. After seeing more and more cupcake-focused bakeries in the city, my partner and I joked about opening up one of our own in Richmond."

In 2009 the joke became serious and Fraker chose a completely different career path. "There were many challenges embedded in this decision," says Fraker, "including stepping outside my comfort zone, managing and leading adult peers now, instead of children in a music classroom."

The sweet part was Fraker had help — a business partner, Jason Ferrell. "Jason has a knack for marketing and a keen eye for detail," says Fraker. While Ferrell searched for the perfect location and polished up a business plan, Fraker was free to develop recipes and do lots of taste-testing.

Fraker's mother also helped and was a source of inspiration for what would become the shop's best-selling cupcake. "Through opening the bakery, I discovered that red velvet cake was my mom's childhood favorite," says Fraker.

Wendy Fraker ('03P) passed away unexpectedly while her son was in the process of opening the bakery. Fraker named the "Wendy's

Red Velvet" cupcake in memory of his mother. It is the shop's top-seller, and Frostings annually donates proceeds from its sales to the Wendy G. Fraker Memorial Scholarship Fund, which supports students pursuing a culinary arts education.

Fraker says his JMU experience taught him life lessons he has applied to his cupcake business. "How to manage time, effective interpersonal communication, leadership, learning from mistakes and turning those experiences into success ... these are all things that help me daily in running a thriving business."

Fraker's thriving small business turned into a nationally recognized one when he competed on *Cupcake Wars*, a reality competition where bakers face off to see who can create the best cupcakes. Fraker and his teammate, Frostings cupcake artist

Jessica Jones, made 1,000 cupcakes in two hours to try and win the grand prize — \$10,000 and the opportunity to showcase their creations at the Los Angeles premiere of the musical *Wicked*.

"*Cupcake Wars* is intense! It's fast-paced, stressful and requires an incredible amount of teamwork and natural choreography in the kitchen" says Fraker. "The clock adds a ton of pressure to an already intense environment and it's pretty

intimidating watching the judges pick apart your creation, bite by bite!"

The Frostings pair took second place, but the work that went into baking 1,000 cupcakes for the show was worth the effort.

"The day after the show aired, things went crazy — in a good way," says Fraker. "We had a line out the door with people curious about our cupcakes. We've had people from all over the state and even from across the county make a point to check us out for the first time."

Fraker says his experiences have been very positive and humbling. "Frostings came out of nowhere. It started as a joke between two guys and has developed into a thriving business that has left a mark on the Richmond community and is now a nationally-recognized bakery! Seeing customers return to our store and become 'regulars,' being chosen by a couple to cater their wedding day, seeing a child with severe food allergies enjoy his or her first dessert, watching our talented and devoted employees thrive and grow while pursuing their talents ... these are the things that make me the most proud." ❧

* Learn more at www.frostingsva.com.



Music education major Matt Fraker ('03) hit a high note with a second-place finish on the Food Network's *Cupcake Wars*. The Frostings Bake Shop owner says his JMU education helps him run his business and follow his passion.