

Yorker named top pastry chef

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Scott on winning: "It was kind of unbelievable. I wasn't sure exactly how that happened."



(Photo: Submitted)

After following an unconventional career path, Mandi Scott never expected to be celebrated for her passion.

Winning the 2015 pastry chef of the year award from the Harrisburg chapter of the American Culinary Federation was — if you'll pardon the pun — the icing on the cake.

"The other two candidates were also instructors at the school where I work," says Scott, an adjunct professor at YTI Career Institute in Springettsbury Township. "Both of them are fantastic, so I was sure I wouldn't win."

But when the voting was over, her fellow culinary experts had chosen the 37-year-old York City resident to take home the honor.

"It was kind of unbelievable," she says. "I wasn't sure exactly how that happened."

Her father, David Scott, isn't quite so surprised. He's seen his daughter's creative culinary skills grow through the years.

"I have her chocolate church here at the house," he says, describing a piece she made in college for a charity auction down to the slivered almonds she used for shingles. A specially made plastic case has kept the treasure intact. "It's been under there for 11 years."

An uncertain path: Despite the talents that earned her the pastry chef of the year title, culinary school wasn't Mandi Scott's first career choice. She took her creative talents in a different direction, starting off at art school.

"It was my dream ... and I was really excited about it," she says. "But I wondered how I would make a career of it."

After getting her culinary degree from the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, Scott picked up real-world skills managing the bakery for Brown's Orchards and began teaching others at YTI how to manage a commercial kitchen and how to create pies, cakes, tarts and more advanced classical French pastries.

But she has a favorite skill in the culinary world — one that requires some artistry.

"I really like decorating cakes," she says. "My grandmother used to do that for each of our birthdays; she would do some kind of special dinner for us and ask what we wanted. ... I guess she was my inspiration."

Two years ago, Scott took that inspiration even further, to the level of certified executive pastry chef, which requires additional educational hours, work experience and supervisory experience.

"I really challenged myself to get certified," she says.

Passing it on: Now, in addition to teaching at YTI, Scott teaches culinary arts to high-schoolers in Bel Air, Maryland. Helping other students find their path, whether roundabout or straightforward, is a passion for her.


"I felt so much pressure as a high school student: had to go to school, had to get a good job, had to get a four-year degree," she says. "That's just not for everybody."

But in the pastry arts, she has found a niche for both professional success and personal satisfaction.

"There's a freedom in cooking. It can take you around the world," she says. "It's exciting. It's dynamic. It's always changing."

—Reach Mel Barber at mbarber@yorkdispatch.com.

Find out more: For more information about careers in the culinary arts, visit the American Culinary Federation Harrisburg chapter's website at acfharrisburg.org.



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