

# Best Desserts

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# VeryVera— SPECIAL DELIVERY

From Vera's kitchen to your doorstep, sweets and savories arrive ready to satisfy. BY LINDA WRIGHT / PHOTOS BY BRENT CLINE, MAC JAMIESON, AND JOHN WOOD

VeryVera has been spreading goodness into households for 25 years. Vera is Vera Stewart of Augusta, Georgia. After teaching home economics for four years, she decided to start a catering business working from home. This way she would be able to spend more time with her two small boys. In 1984 she moved to her first location and catered under the name of Vera Stewart Occasions. During the slow months, Vera's accountant challenged her to keep the fires burning—in her ovens, that is. So Vera decided to try to sell her cakes through the mail. She began by tweaking the recipe for her grandmother's pound cake. She soon found that baking was the easy part; the challenge was the shipping. The cake needed to arrive fresh and in one piece. So to test shipping ideas, Vera mailed cakes to her four siblings around the country. Once she was able to develop a successful packaging and shipping system, she was in business.

The first pound cakes were named after Vera's siblings. She explains, "I named Amaretto Cream for Bitsy, Trip's cake was Lemon Crisp, Harry's was the Old-fashioned, Cream Cheese for Lou, and for me I made Vera's Chocolate. Vera says that now, they offer seven pound cakes, six layer cakes, pecan sandies, cake truffles, and a Cake of the Month. There is even a Cake-of-the-Month Club. They've







A tempting array of VeryVera sweets including Vera's Chocolate Pound Cake, Bitsy's Amaretto Cream Pound Cake, and the Strawberry Layer Cake seem to fly out the door with VeryVera's customers.

shipped cakes to all 50 states, Europe, Japan, and even Iraq. When asked what their most popular cake is, Vera responded that during the holidays, it's red velvet but that during the rest of the year, strawberry wins.

In 2000 VeryVera branched out from desserts and began offering main dish casseroles and spreads in the local Augusta store. Since shipping and packaging had been developed for the cake products, Vera's Gourmet-To-Go was off and running. Today, a full menu of homemade entrées, spreads, and breads can be shipped to family or friends or picked up at VeryVera's to be enjoyed at home.

Vera admits, "There are no lazy days of summer around here. During June and July, VeryVera's becomes a cooking camp. Kids ages 8 to 14 trade out the bug spray for the cooking

spray." In addition to cooking up creative recipes like Armadillo Potatoes and Hot Diggity Dog Pizza Boats, the kids learn about food etiquette and how to plan and host a party. Vera laughs, "I'm really raising my future work crew."

A banner on the catalog says, "From doorbell to dinner bell—VeryVera's delivers gourmet goodness." And the newest VeryVera project, BeCause, continues to deliver goodness. Vera credits Kathi Adams, a breast cancer survivor, as the brainchild of BeCause. "With Kathi's ideas and our financial help, we are able to give prepaid meal vouchers to newly diagnosed breast cancer patients while they undergo treatments."

After 25 years, VeryVera continues to spread goodness into households with cakes, casseroles—and caring.