

Bakery hits the sweet spot

"Maybe we'd run for public office. Maybe we'd be dog walkers."

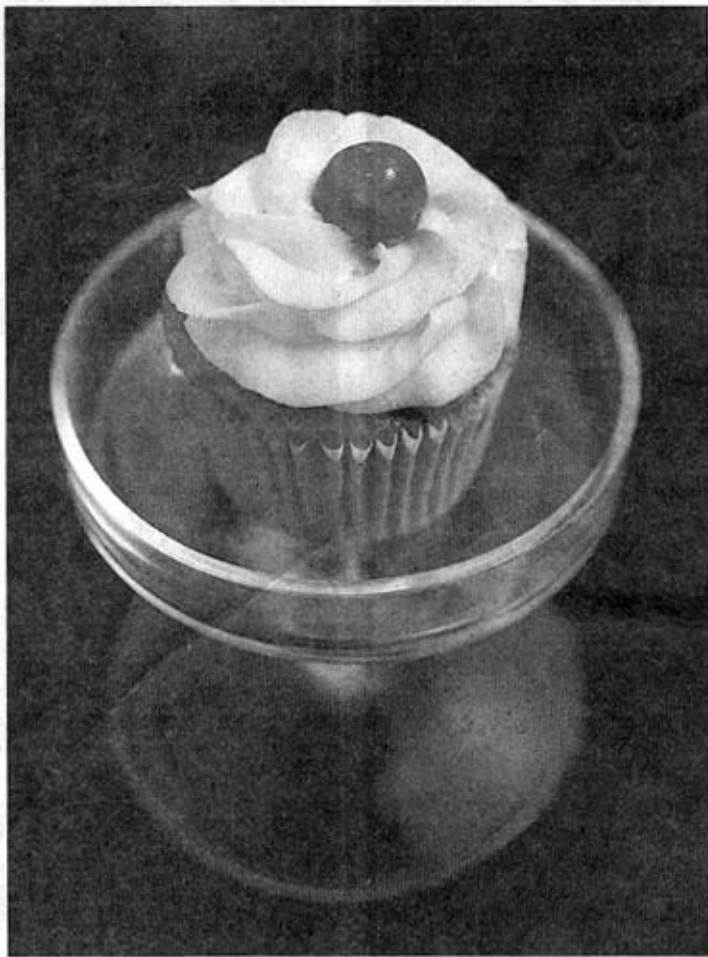
It turns out, Career Plan B was cupcakemaker. Eighteen years in public relations made Rogers savvy about trends — and cupcakes were a big one.

But what has taken cupcakes from the homeroom mom's sticky chore to adult obsession?

"Part of it is a nostalgic feeling about childhood," says Rogers. "It doesn't matter if you're 1 or 101, it plays to our egos. You get your very own cake and you're not sharing. They're portable, they're cute and they're portion-controlled so you don't overindulge."

Yeah, right. The Cupcake Spot has a 1950s diner motif, lots of chrome and hot pink. There are funky armchairs and bold black-and-white tile floors. But where X marks the Spot is the glass case of sweet stuff.

They make about 14 varieties each day, so though each is a single-serving cake, there's no law that you may have just one. In the name of journalism, I tried every one in the case, giving top honors to the Chocolate Elvis (banana cupcake, peanut butter buttercream and a dollop of chocolate ganache), the Berry Squared (strawberry cake topped with strawberry-raspberry cream cheese icing) and the Va-Va-Vanilla (a regular vanilla cake/icing combo elevated by black dots of



KATHLEEN FLYNN | Times

The Cuppy, strawberry with vanilla bean icing and a sour cherry ball on top, is one of more than a dozen Cupcake Spot options.

real vanilla bean).

It hasn't all been smooth sailing. Rogers and Longo have had a fair number of wipeouts, navigating conventional to convec-

tion oven conversions, the shift from measuring to weighing ingredients (commercial bakers get better accuracy this way), and adapting "big cake" recipes

» IF YOU GO

The Cupcake Spot

2401 S Dale Mabry Highway, Tampa
(813) 258-3111

Hours: 11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

Prices: \$2.75 per cupcake;
\$15.50 per half dozen; \$30 per dozen

to come out right in the small format. Recipe testing, they kept a big chart, tweaking one variable and dutifully logging the results.

The diligence seems to have paid off. But it's not little kids thronging the Spot — one morning Viamedia cable advertising rep Lee Kercher bought a half dozen individually boxed cupcakes for potential clients.

"People get defensive when you're selling advertising," Kercher explains. "You've got to knock down their defenses. How do you stand out? With an unexpected treat."

Cupcake as secret weapon? The Tampa Bay area seems ready to embrace that idea.

Contact Laura Reiley at lreiley@sptimes.com or (727) 892-2293. Her blog, *the Mouth of Tampa Bay*, can be found at www.blogs.tampabay.com/dining.