

# South Florida Sun-Sentinel

## Business

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Bride-to-be Melissa Zeleznik visited two other wedding cake stores before she found the perfect place to order an elaborate five-tiered cake with key lime and white chocolate and raspberry fillings.

That place turned out to be Susie's Scrumptious Sweets, a custom-designed cake business that sets up shop smack dab in the middle of a Davie florist's Saturday afternoons.

Zeleznik said she and her fiancé have been thrilled to be able to pop in and sample free slices of a dozen different gourmet cakes before deciding on the one they wanted.

"It's unbelievable, a very unusual experience," said Zeleznik, of Plantation. "This is the third time we've been here for a sampling and they're so personable and friendly and their cake is fantastic."

Susie Stallings, the company's owner and president, said the concept is a bit unusual, but it's been a smart business move to give away samples and meet with customers at the Field of Flowers superstore on University Drive near Griffin Road.

"I'm very happy with it. It brings in steady foot traffic and is a nice environment, surrounded by flowers and lovely music," she said.

Every Saturday, Stallings' husband, Wilt, greets people at a "tasting station" at the florist's, where he schmoozes with brides-to-be, members of wedding parties and anyone else who wants to pull up a chair. He serves generous, free slices of the gourmet cakes, along with ice water and Cuban coffee.

Meanwhile, Susie Stallings sits behind a desk in another part of the store, talking details with customers who have made an appointment to place their order.

Stallings began renting space at the florist's seven years ago, and it's been a win-win situation for both businesses, the owners said.

"There's a good synergy there," said Donn F. Flipse, who owns Field of Flowers. "We've never tried to quantify it, but we know that she gets business from people coming in for flowers and we get business from people coming in to order a cake."

Sharon and Jerry Slutski, of Cooper City, said they've been buying cakes from Susie's for years and have referred lots of friends.

"They're accommodating and sweet, and their cakes are outrageous," said Sharon Slutski. "The quality, the taste, the presentation, everything is perfect."

While she makes cakes for baptisms, Sweet 16s, baby showers, birthdays and other events, Susie Stallings' bread and butter is weddings.

"The wedding cake must be photogenic. It's the centerpiece of the whole room," Stallings explained. "It must be beautiful and edible."

Among her biggest orders were a wedding for one of Sen. Bob Graham's daughters and a 50th birthday party for Harry Wayne Casey, leader of KC and the Sunshine Band at Hialeah Park.

The actual baking is done at a cramped location in a Sunrise office park, where Stallings, her daughter, Chantelle, and a few part-time employees make and design the cakes.

Stallings said that as a child growing up in Peru, she learned about baking from her family's pastry chef. But she never thought of baking seriously until she was 39 and her husband suggested a cake decorating class. She tried it and was hooked.

It started as a hobby, but by 1994, it had mushroomed into a business. Stallings was offered a spot at a bridal shop, where she and her husband began serving slices and meeting with brides-to-be on Saturdays.

"For the first five years, it was tough," she recalled. "We were paying bank loans and had to take out a second mortgage on our house."

The business began to grow as the word spread, and when the bridal shop's space became too cramped, she moved to Field of Flowers.

Stallings said she now averages 1,200 to 1,500 events a year. She has purchased space in a larger condo-style warehouse in Sunrise where she plans on moving her commercial kitchen next year.

But it's not just the cakes that draw customers. Stallings is quick to point out that her husband of 30 years is an essential part of the business.

"I couldn't do it without him. He has the patience of Job and serves everyone with a smile on his face," she said.

On a typical Saturday, he hands out cake to 50 to 150 customers, always joking and chatting.

"Some of the women who come there all the time are his cake groupies," his wife said. "They'll sit and drool at him for two hours. I even had to chase a pair out of there."

Stallings, a construction superintendent for a Miami development company, said it's a nice change of pace for him to serve sweets on Saturdays.

"I get to see pretty girls and talk to people and serve great cake," he said. "You can't beat that, can you?"



**Symbiosis:** Susie Stallings of Susie's Scrumptious Sweets takes orders for cakes on Saturdays at Field of Flowers in Davie. The arrangement