



**PAUL'S**  
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PICAYUNE, MS

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PASTRY SHOP  
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PICAYUNE, MS  
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Sherri Paul Thigpen keeps the king cake tradition alive at Paul's Pastry Shop.



# KING CAKE

reigns supreme at  
**PAUL'S**  
PASTRY SHOP



Talk about king cakes in Mississippi and Paul's Pastry Shop will be mentioned. King cakes are a Mardi Gras tradition that the Paul family has been baking for more than 41 years.

King cakes are a sweet treat that can be traced back to the birth of Jesus.

In European countries, the coming of the wise men bearing gifts to the Christ Child is celebrated twelve days after Christmas. The celebration, called Epiphany, Little Christmas, or Twelfth Night, is a time of exchanging gifts and feasting. One of the most popular customs is the baking of a special cake in honor of the three kings.

The king cake tradition includes a trinket that has special meaning and usually brings some responsibility to the recipient.

There are many variations of the king cake around the world, but in the

Gulf Coast area, especially in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, the cake contains a small baby. Residents perpetuate the celebration by having the person who received the baby continue the festivities with another party and another cake. King cake parties continue until the first day of Lent, ending on Fat Tuesday, which is Mardi Gras.

Paul's Pastry Shop is the go-to source for king cakes in Mississippi. Their flavors range from the original cinnamon to piña colada and include a choice of over 40 flavors or flavor combinations. One of the most popular is strawberry cream cheese.

Originally a ring of dough with little decoration, king cakes have evolved into beautiful creations. They are decorated in three colors: green, representing faith; purple, representing justice; and gold, representing the voice of power.

In addition to baking a beautiful cake, Paul's makes them delicious with their variety of fillings and a coating of almonds.

According to owner Sherri Paul

Thigpen, the pastry shop churns out up to 1,000 cakes a day early in the season with that number rising as Fat Tuesday approaches. They have shipped them to every state in the union. During a season, Paul's bakes between 55,000 and 60,000 king cakes.

The equipment in the bakery is designed to help the staff produce this large volume. Large walk in ovens can accommodate racks that hold 20 pans of cakes. Two racks fit in each oven, allowing over 80 cakes to be baked at one time. Before this expansion, there were two deck ovens that accommodated 16 cakes at one time.

A large portion of Paul's business is individual orders shipped by delivery service. The cakes are shipped "naked" to help insure the cake arrives at its destination in good condition. The package includes a cake with the baby tucked inside and packets of glaze, colored sugar, and nuts. In addition to a better quality product arriving at the customer's door, the arrangement gives the customer the opportunity to have a



Pecan Praline



Mississippi Mud





Shipped king cakes arrive with all the ingredients necessary to decorate, which makes a fun family activity.



Donna Fleming, top, glazes king cakes while Suzie Evans applies the sugar.

little fun decorating their own cake.

Paul's also features a New Orleans Saints themed king cake which has become extremely popular in the last few years. The year the Saints won the Super Bowl, they shipped thousands of cakes bearing the team's theme, versus 20 for the Baltimore Colts, who fell victim to the Saints in the 2010 game.

One thing that sets them apart from their competition is the dough in their cakes. Sherri says it is more like a bread instead of the Danish type dough used in many king cakes. The dough holds the filling better and gives the cakes a better texture. The recipe is a tightly-held family recipe that has been used since 1972.

Many king cake bakers today put the baby on the outside of the cake, but Paul's continues to maintain the tradition of putting the small plastic baby inside the cake. "We've asked our customers and they tell us they still want it that way," Sherri shares.

The business is also a family affair. Sherri oversees the company, but also has a lot of help from family and trusted employees. Her daughter and son-in-law work in the business and her husband handles internet orders. At any given time, grandchildren may be found in various jobs, learning the business. In addition to family members, there are 32 employees. The crew shifts into high gear in January each year after taking a little vacation between Christmas and New Year's.

After the first of the year a night crew works to turn out thousands of cakes before Fat Tuesday.

King cakes are available year round and for any occasion, but the bulk of the business comes between January



1 and the day of Mardi Gras.

They are available at the shop in Pica-yune and in approximately 45 stores around the South Mississippi area and as far away as Huntsville, Alabama.

King cakes are a huge tradition that have helped put Paul's Pastry Shop on the map. However, the sweet confections associated with Mardi Gras are not all there is to Paul's.

The bakery produces some of the most beautiful sweets and pastries that can be found anywhere. The staff works hard to produce cakes for all occasions, as well as cupcakes, pies, and just about anything else one can imagine.

Not only is Paul's a great place to go for a



sugar fix, they offer a deli with a daily lunch special prepared by a trained chef who knows his business.

Ed Hahn has been in the food industry since 1983 and spent 15 years in the kitchen of Chappy's, a favorite restaurant on the Mississippi Gulf Coast that was forced away by Hurricane Katrina. Hahn uses his culinary expertise to create unique seafood dishes that please the palate.

The deli was added when the company moved to its present location five years ago.

In 1970, the Paul family purchased a small bakery, began making king cakes, and thus founded Paul's Pastry Shop. In 1989, Sherri bought it from her parents, then moved it to a larger location in 1992. Five years ago, an even bigger facility was built at the intersection of I-59 and Sycamore Rd.

The new location features a party room that includes a touch of Picayune's history. Light fixtures from the Ritz Theatre adorn the walls.

Paul's meets the need for king cakes for Mardi Gras, but has also has created a culinary center in the South Mississippi city of Picayune. *edm*

*Paul's Pastry Shop  
1 Sycamore Rd., Ste. A, Picayune  
800.669.5180  
www.paulspastry.com*



Lights from the historic Ritz Theatre in Picayune adorn the walls of the party room at Paul's.

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