

**Baton Rouge Folklife Survey  
Louisiana Division of the Arts**

**Angella St. Romain, Manager  
Joe Gambino's Bakery**

**Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
Joe Gambino's Bakery  
March 30, 2015**

**Laura Marcus Green, Ph.D., Fieldworker**

**Interview Identifier: afc2014023\_01961**

**INTERVIEW LOG**

*NOTE: Direct quotes are indicated in italics.*

**Laura Marcus Green**

*00:12*

Introduces interview; asks Angella St. Romain to tell her story about how she got into the baking business.

**Angella St. Romain**

*00:44*

**Background; Getting started in bakery business**

When she was around twelve years old, Angie had a neighborhood paper route, with about 80 houses that she delivered papers to on her bicycle. One of the gentlemen on her route was Mr. Sidney Champagne, who owned the local bakery in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, where she grew up. Every Sunday morning, he would wait for her, beautifully dressed, with smoking jacket and an ascot, even though he didn't smoke. He would wait there for his newspaper, and she always delivered it to him. He was a very, very kind gentleman.

One day he stopped Angella, and asked her how much money she made on her paper route in a month, and she said about \$85, about \$1 per customer. He told her that he was thinking about opening the bakery from 6:00 in the morning till noon on Sundays. Because Angella was never late with his newspaper, he thought he would like hire her. He offered her \$85 a month, just to work those four Sundays a month.

So there it got started—she sold her paper route and got started. She came in on Sunday mornings and waited on customers and things like that. Mrs. Champagne, his wife, was lovely and a great cake decorator. She would come in every Sunday and bring Angella lunch, since it was close to noon and Angie would have been there since 6:00 am. They were just sweet people.

Mrs. Champagne showed Angella how to write on a cake, then how to make a rose. She was giving Angella cake decorating lessons the whole time on those Sunday mornings. *"And it just felt natural."* Angella stayed in it until about three years after she graduated high school, when she decided she needed to get out and make some real money and get a real job. She had always looked at the bakery business as a little part-time thing, even though at that point she was actually running the business for the new owners, Mr. Champagne's son, who had taken over. Sidney Champagne passed it down to the next generation.

### **Angella St. Romain**

02:54

#### **Leaving baking temporarily and coming back; history of Champagne Bakery in Breaux Bridge**

Angella got out of baking and went into financial services, and *"hated every minute of it,"* even though she made more money and was off every weekend. *"And I decided, you know what? Life's just too short. And I got back in the business, and here I am today, thirty-two years, thirty-three years later!"* Champagne's Breaux Bridge Bakery is still there, now on the fifth generation. It's a sweet little bakery shop. They taught Angella how to bake from scratch, they taught her how to decorate cakes, how to manage the ordering system, how to manage the people they hired, even though she was younger than most of them. *"They were really smart business people, and they taught me a lot. And I kind of owe my profession to them, I guess."* Angella initially worked for members of the third generation. Sonny, the son who took over while Angella was there was the fourth, and Paul, who owns it now, Mr. Sonny's son, would be the fifth. It's really neat. Mr. Sidney Champagne was the grandson of the man who founded it. Angella thinks it was founded in around 1913, she is not sure. It's a historic building here in Louisiana. [Note: LMG looked it up and it was started in 1888, [www.champagnesbakery.com](http://www.champagnesbakery.com).]

*"They still make the best tiny little tea cookies. They're called a pink sandwich cookie and oh my God, everybody who grew up in Breaux Bridge, when you had a good report card, they would give you a free one. You know? So it was a great marketing strategy because everybody, to this day, who is from that little town, knows what a pink sandwich cookie is! And you can only find them there. It's like their family recipe and it's a secret thing, and it's wonderful."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

05:12

#### **What is a master baker?**

Angella had referred to Sidney Champagne as a master baker the other day; LMG asks her to define that. Well, there are actually courses and tests people take. *"And it's all about knowing the science behind the whole baking process. Because baking—as opposed to cooking—really is a scientific process. And each ingredient lends itself to how you want that product to come out. So, we did scratch baking, where you started off with flours and eggs, and ended up with cake!"*

Angella has taken a few short-course classes to aid in her decorating skills, but she has been fortunate enough to have wonderful teachers. As far as the baking and things, she had great teachers. She utilizes what she learned from them in her management process, even today.

Because if something's wrong with the batter or the end product, the baked cake, she can look at it and tell what was left out of it, etc. *"That just comes from knowing what ingredients do what."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

07:09

#### **Angella's learning process in the bakery business**

What made Angella say yes, when offered the opportunity to work for Champagne's Bakery? Delivering newspapers had its challenges, so she thought that working in a bakery would surely be easier. It was happenstance.

At Champagne's, she began with waiting on customers. There would be fresh cinnamon rolls and doughnuts made when she got there, so she would put those out and wait on the customers. But then, when people purchased cakes out of the showcase, she would have to go get Mrs. Champagne to come write on them, so she showed Angella how to write on cakes. So that's how her cake decorating actually started. In the summers, they invited her to come in on Saturdays and work with the cake decorators. She has always liked to draw and to artistic things, so that was a lot of fun. So, she got to work hands-on with the decorators and learned to ice cakes, and one thing led to another. It really just worked out.

One day when she was working, one of the bakers was sick. Sonny Champagne Jr. asked her if she could come back in the kitchen, as there were other cake decorators there at the time. She would oversee the decorators and help them bake. *"That's where I really got into the actual nuts and bolts of the actual production of it, and making cake batter, and . . . and they were so precise with everything, everything was scaled out, perfectly. Which is what baking actually is. You need to have precise measurements and stuff, and that's why it's all done by weights, instead of a cup. You know, because a cup of flour may weigh anywhere from six ounces to eleven ounces, depending on how tight you pack it in there, and the type of flour, so it makes all the difference in the world."* There are bakers' balance scales that she learned on. Now they have electronic scales, where you zero them out. But back then, they had scoops and these U-shaped bowls that you would put on the scale, and you would have a counter weight to it, and you would figure out if it was a pound and a half, and you would just scoop in the amount of the ingredients you needed, like that. That's how it was done. Angella still has some balance scales that they use to this day at Gambino's. Because they really were very precise.

### **Angella St. Romain**

10:28

#### **Leaving the bakery business, working in finance for five years**

Angella worked at Champagne's Bakery just on the weekends until she was a senior in high school. Her senior year, she had plenty of credits since she was a good student, so she worked at the bakery in the morning, attended school in the afternoons. She stayed there for another three or four years, until the bakery shut down for a while, due to issues in the family. At that point, she decided to do something different, so that was when she went into working in finance for MetLife, where she worked for five years. It wasn't fun for her, in spite of making

more money and having weekends off.

Eventually, she got out of financial services and went to work at a little French bakery in Lafayette for a few years, and then ended up here in Baton Rouge, running a *big* bakery—Gambino's is much larger than Champagne's, where she started.

### **Angella St. Romain**

11:49

#### **Coming to work at Gambino's**

How did she choose Gambino's? They actually chose her. She was in the Lafayette area, working at the French bakery, and Paul Scelfo [who works at Gambino's and was around during the interview and helped LMG with photos prior to the interview]—Angella used to do work for him at the Cajun Dome, when he was a caterer over there. *"Anytime the caterers in Lafayette wanted a different kind of cake or a sculpted cake or something, they knew to call me. Because they knew I would do it, I would take on any challenge, 'cause that was my thing. It's kind of like, the bigger, the better. And his cousin, Sam Scelfo, actually owns Joe Gambino's Bakery. And one day I was at the Cajun Dome doing some contract work for 'em and doing this huge six-foot alligator for the Ice Gators. And he said, 'My cousin wants to open up a Gambino's Bakery in Lafayette.' And he said, 'And I told him you'd be a good manager for 'em.' And I said, 'Oh, okay.' And that's really how I got involved with Gambino's Bakery. I wasn't looking for a job."* When they called her, they said, we hear you're looking for a job, and she told them she really wasn't, she was happy doing what she was doing. But they talked, had coffee at CC's Coffeeshouse, and the rest is history, here she is, all the way in Baton Rouge.

13:15

She opened up the Gambino's store in Lafayette and quickly realized that just having a retail outlet to run was not her thing, *"I needed to be in the mix of the decorating and the baking and everything else."* They needed help in the Baton Rouge Gambino's, and so she began commuting from Breaux Bridge, where she lived at the time. She had a 13-year-old daughter at home at the time, her other two daughters were grown. It was difficult making the commute each day, one-two hours each way, depending on the traffic, so she decided to move. She commuted for two years, then decided to move to Baton Rouge.

### **Angella St. Romain**

14:16

#### **What Angella loves about bakery work; Gambino's Bakery History**

What was it that she missed when she left baking? *"The creativity of it. Yeah, the creativity of it. And it's fun. I mean, you know, what's not to like? You're dealing with people at a happy time of their life. You know, nothing more boring than going and telling the people about, 'Well you know you're going to die one day, and so you need to leave your family with gobs of money.' That just wasn't very appealing to me, you know? But people trusted me, so I did well. But it still, it just wasn't my thing. You know, over here, we're dealing with people when they're having a birthday—they're planning a party, an occasion of some sort. And so, you're getting people at a good time in their life, and you can actually be part of their life for a long time. I mean, I have*

*people that I've done wedding cakes for, that their children are getting married and I'm doing their daughters' wedding cakes. And that's just kind of cool, you know?"*

She has been in Baton Rouge with Gambino's for fifteen years. The store is no longer in the Gambino family. Sam Scelfo worked for Joe Gambino as his business manager. He was a Tulane student in New Orleans. When Mr. Joe decided to retire, none of his children were interested in the business. She doesn't know what they went off to do, but they decided it was a lot of hard work and not a lot of money, and they were going to move on to bigger and better things. Mr. Joe offered to sell it to Sam and his head baker. Those two bought the business together. The baker since retired and Sam bought out his share. Now he owns it. He's done very well with it. He's opened in a lot of other locations. He's a smart businessman.

### **Angella St. Romain**

16:43

#### **Working with the public; Effective communication, understanding what a customer wants in a cake order**

Angella had mentioned that the Champagne family had taught her, among other things, to deal with difficult customers. *"They had a way about them of understanding people and treating people just the way people want to be treated. Because we're dealing in a service industry. And sometimes what you think is the right, maybe, decorations, this is what this lady wanted, and then they come to pick the cake up, and they say, 'Oh, that's not what I wanted . . . ' and so it's kind of like, 'Well okay, hold on, tell me what you would like, and let's fix it.' So those kind of skills—and that's still to this day one of the challenges in training my sales staff—to communicate effectively on an order form, what that customer's vision for that cake is. And then, for the decorators to interpret correctly from that order form what that customer wants. And so, it really is a conversation that you have to have with each and every customer, about, 'What's the event for? Tell me about the other decorations.' We want the cake to work, in all the different settings.*

*And so, it takes a little time, and a lot of people, they don't understand how important that is, you know? If it's a shade of blue, I want to know what shade of blue is it? And if you give me something to match, even better. . . . You really have to be very precise about what you write down. And it's a learning process, as the sales girls both know, 'cause I tell 'em, my goal is that, when that cake decorator gets that order, she doesn't have to go ask you a question. Because we don't have time for that! 'Cause it's all very—you know, you want a fresh cake. So you're not doing this three days before, you're doing it the day of, so it's like, okay, hold on, we don't have time to stop and ask. 'Cause most people want it on the weekend, you know? What you can get away with during the middle of the week is something, but come Friday and Saturday, we are, like, heads—backs to the ball, you know?"*

Gambino's is open seven days a week. Angella remembers when everything was closed on Sundays. It was around the time Angella started working in Baton Rouge that the Blue Laws changed, in the 1970s, and businesses could be open on a Sunday. Sundays are a big day for cake. And people may not have room in their fridge for a cream pie or a Doberge cake, which needs to be refrigerated. So being open on Sunday makes it easy for people, and Gambino's

provides the storage for them.

### **Angella St. Romain**

19:43

#### **Doberge Cakes**

The tradition of the Doberge cake began in 1949. Joe Gambino obtained the recipe from Beulah Ledner for her Doberge cakes. *"We still do it the exact same way she did it. And with Miss Eloise onboard, she could verify that for sure. She said, 'Yep, that's still the same way we used to do it.' The custard is unbelievably good. It's made from scratch, we make it three and four times a week in a big, old twenty-gallon kettle. And it's definitely one of our signature items here at Gambino's."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

20:30

#### **Brides' and Grooms' Cakes**

At the time of the interview, Angella is expecting a bride to come in for a consultation. How will that go? Is this her first time coming in? What's the procedure? Usually, it's the first time coming in. She might have gone to other bakeries. They like to do a tasting with the brides. *"Actually, my philosophy on wedding cakes and grooms' cakes has always been—and I guess this comes from the design, creative side of me. All the cakes are different, because all the brides and grooms are different. And I have always had that philosophy. And I can remember, even when I worked [at Champagne's Bakery in Breaux Bridge], way at the very beginning, we had Cake Number 1-33, and the brides would pick one out and they'd decide if they wanted yellow roses or pink roses, and that was about it. And I fought and screamed, at that little bakery in Breaux Bridge—I said, well that's crazy. Supposing they don't want a rose, supposing when they—and so they would let me do, you know because I was the one doing it anyway.*

*"And over here, it's the same thing, you know? We really try to individualize each and every appointment, and try to get into, okay, tell me what's going on with the whole wedding party, so that what we do here, fits. And that's what's important.*

*And now, grooms' cakes have become a national phenomenon, where at one time, this was only done in the South. Now, this is a personal theory only, but it used to be, when I worked in Breaux Bridge, that the godmother would purchase the groom's cake, and cut the groom's cake at the reception. And I used to laugh about it and say, because people from up north would say, 'What is a groom's cake? We don't do that. We have the wedding cake, the bridal cake—I've never heard of a groom's cake.' And I used to tell them, I think it was some little Catholic mom, that just couldn't stand it that her son wasn't going to have his own cake, and that bride had her own! But I could be wrong. I mean, but you know, it really was a Southern thing. And now it's—geez, it's almost as big as the wedding cakes now. I mean, because people just bring out so much personality with these grooms' cakes, it's lots of fun, it's very creative."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

22:36

## **Ordering Wedding Cakes**

Sometimes the grooms see the cake design before the wedding. Sometimes they are more vocal about the cakes than the brides are, some of them really get into it. It's lots of fun. Sometimes, it's a total surprise, they're not expecting anything, but that bride has pulled out something personal for him. It just makes it lots of fun.

How does the groom's cake design process work? Does the bakery show the bride sample photos, or does the customer tell them what they want? They do both but usually, Angella lets them talk. Because once they start talking, Angella will pick up on hints about their style. If they don't know what they want, she'll ask the bride to tell her about the dress. The dress sets the tone for the wedding. From there, Angella can pick up on hints about what they like—if it's lacy, if it's taffeta or silk. Is it an outdoor theme, is it natural, do they like glitter and glitz? Angella has had three daughters get married and they were all different, so she knows. The last one got married a few weeks ago. The oldest is an architect and she wanted something very modern. Her youngest daughter got married second and she wanted something very glitzy, and she likes jewelry and bling. And the third daughter likes the more natural look, and she wanted more soft lace and very feminine, just green and white flowers. That's just in Angella's family, so when it goes beyond that, there is a lot of variation.

## **Angella St. Romain**

24:26

### **Cake decorating styles and techniques**

Now there are a lot of techniques for achieving certain looks. When Angella first got started, there was a product called Royal Icing, which dried, turned hard. In those days, you could buy sets at the grocery store that said Happy Birthday, etc.—they were little bits of hardened icing—that was Royal Icing. They used to make pieces of lace ahead of time, and then add them as lace points to butter cream, to give a lacy effect to a wedding cake.

Now they have so many more products that have been developed. They do lace molds. There's a product called SugarVeil. It's like flexible icing. It's the best thing since sliced bread, as far as Angella is concerned, because you can make these beautiful lace molds that stay flexible, you can put them on the cake, you can wrap the cake with it. There are so many new techniques and products that have come out, it's hard to stay abreast of everything. The SugarVeil is not a stencil—they do some work with stencils. But it is a mold that you spread the icing in, let it dry, then you peel it out and you can wave it around, it's so sturdy—it's just wonderful!

Angella has been in the business for 32 years, so she has seen a lot of different things. It's funny, it's just new techniques to create the same things, with a lot less labor involved. Angella or someone with a studied eye could see the difference, but most people wouldn't know from looking what technique you have to use to get things done. Even some of the people who take the orders tell customers who are asking for a particular thing, "I don't know what she calls it, but I know she can do that."

## Angella St. Romain

26:28

### Angella's role at Gambino's; King Cakes at Gambino's

Angella is now a managing partner. She oversees the whole operation. There is another store in Baton Rouge, and she needs to make sure that all of the orders get processed for both stores. *"I fill in wherever is needed, whether it be washing pans or decorating the wedding cakes, only because I've been doing this long enough, I've been in every facet of the business."* Her head baker was out a few weeks ago, and she had to go back to the kitchen and bake. She doesn't mind that. Up until last year, when Mr. Paul (Scelfo) came to work at this store, she had to do people's schedules, count money, etc. but now she is able to focus more on the creative end, which is her thing. Mr. Paul is the cousin of the owner. During king cake season, it gets really crazy, with filling orders and shipping and wedding cakes. Because even during king cake season, your regular business is still going on. You might have 30,000 king cakes that are going to be made in six weeks (between January 6th and Mardi Gras), and there are twelve extra employees. So, Angella said, let's get some help at the front end of the store, so she can get what she needs to get done in the back.

Of the king cakes they make during the season, they don't do as much shipping as they do in New Orleans, because they don't have a website for the Baton Rouge store. So they do it the old fashioned way—people call in or come by the store. They only shipped out about 3,000 king cakes last year. The New Orleans Gambino's probably shipped about 150,000, because they have a website and can take orders that way.

28:31

Who are they shipping the cakes to? A lot of businesses will ship to their out-of-state clients. A lot of people who have transplanted to other parts of the country—it's that time of year and they miss the king cake, they want one so bad. Those people will share it with their office. That in turn produces more and more people who want all of these king cakes, because people try it and they think it's *wonderful*, so next year they buy one for their family. And it just grows exponentially.

## Angella St. Romain

29:05

### King Cake tradition taking root beyond New Orleans; changes in the King Cake tradition

When Angella first started, king cakes were only being done in New Orleans. She remembers coming to an RBA (Retail Bakers Association) meeting in Baton Rouge, and Gambino's had just moved to Baton Rouge. And Gambino's introduced Baton Rouge to king cakes. The RBA workshop was at Baum's Bakery—a very old established bakery, wonderful people, great products. They were excited because they were doing around three and four king cakes a week. So, Angella went back to Breaux Bridge—she was young and excited, and she said, okay, we're going to sell some king cakes. The owner said, they don't even know what king cakes are around here. We don't really celebrate Mardi Gras around here—they had the day off, but they



didn't celebrate it in that area. For Mardi Gras celebrations, they had one in Mamou, and Lafayette was beginning to have a celebration but it wasn't anything near the size that it is now. So, Angella said, okay, I know what I'm going to do. She decided to bring a king cake to the bank and the school board office, where there were around thirty employees—that was going to be jackpot. They brought them the first king cake for free, told them of the tradition. And they sold about sixty king cakes that year. And they thought they were off the charts. Since then, it's been growing and growing, as Mardi Gras has grown throughout the state now, it's no longer just a New Orleans thing. Mardi Gras is celebrated throughout the state. And so, king cakes are an integral part of it. Angella is the one who started it in Breaux Bridge.

LMG commented that she read on Gambino's website that they now have thirty different king cake fillings. What was the traditional one? From what Angella remembers, the traditional king cake was just a braided cinnamon roll, with different colored sugars on it. She believes that Gambino's might have been the first to do the icing, and then do the sugars on top of the icing. Just putting the braided sweet dough with the sugars, it seemed a little dry. So they had the idea to put the cinnamon roll icing on there, and that took off.

Traditionally, it was not a filled cake. How did filling the cake get started? She doesn't know. She thinks the owner (Mr. Scelfo) would know, as he was right in the middle of that, when it all happened.

They were just happy to have a new product at a time of year when there is not a lot going on. Because there are the heavy holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas, and then you get into a time of year where it's kind of dead for the first few months. Bakeries in other parts of the country struggle at that time of year. Weddings start to take off as the weather warms up in March or April. The biggest birthday months are August and September—this is a proven fact. Nine months after the holidays, Angella points out. The king cakes fill in a quiet time of the season.

## **Angella St. Romain**

33:37

### **Making king cake**

LMG points out that some places advertise their king cakes as "hand filled." Angella describes the process of making a king cake. They start with a 1 lb piece of dough and roll it out until it measures about 9" x 16". They'll put their cinnamon sugar and the king cake baby, and take a plastic spatula and fill it. Then they roll it over and the filling is tucked inside the cake itself before they bake it. They seal it up and make the circle, and then put it in the proof box and let it bake within the king cake itself. The traditional king cakes are still braided, but the ones with the filling they don't braid any more, because the filling would all just bake out.

Is there another way to fill the cake? Some bakeries do a braided king cake and then they'll go with a piping bag and stuff it from the bottom, after. Gambino's finds that you can put in a lot more filling when you hand fill it, which gives a lot more filling in each piece. They like the product better. What are the fillings? They do a lot of fruit, a lot of praline—which is one of the recipes they have at Gambino's. They do a lot of double-filled ones, like cream cheese and

strawberry, or blueberry, or other fruit. The traditional still sells very well—without the filling but with the icing. People seem to like the icing. Gambino's is known for their icing. They have thought about a savory filling, but when you start dealing with food items like bacon or eggs, for example, versus bakery items, you're talking about a different animal, with a different shelf life, etc. With fruit fillings, you know what to do. But making king cakes with savory fillings is not impossible. In five years, she might be doing it, you never know.

### **Angella St. Romain**

36:06

#### **King cake traditions—the plastic baby and king cake parties**

People bring them home, bring them to the office. Some are for the boss. It's a nice treat to bring to work. Teachers' lounges love it. They come in and laugh and say, *"We really never can find out who had the baby."* Gambino's bakes the baby inside. Angella says, *"There's no point—why are you getting a king cake if it doesn't have a baby inside? That's no fun, to stick it in yourself."* They use a plastic baby, sometimes a gold baby. Sometimes people who find the gold baby call up and say, 'Hey I got this baby, it's kind of like a New Orleans Saints' gold, an old gold—did I win something?' It's just Gambino's, our way of doing things. They don't worry about people chipping a tooth? She is sure they have had issues somewhere along the line. There is a disclaimer or warning on the box, beware, there's a plastic baby inside. And if people make a special request, like a kindergarten class or something like that, they honor that, they'll make it special, without the baby. They understand that there are certain situations where it might be a hazard, and they don't want anyone to get hurt. But most people should know what they are getting when they buy a king cake.

What is the king cake party? A lot of times an office will do this on a Friday afternoon, it's time for everyone to go home. They'll cut the king cake and have a cup of coffee with it. Whoever gets the baby has to buy the next one, they get to be king for that week, but they have to buy the next king cake for the next party. Gambino's tries to keep a bunch of king cake on hand, as a lot of people don't order them ahead of time. People know they'll have them in the store. But they honor their orders first. So Angella says, if you take the time to order, I'll be sure you have it for a specific time. When you're making 800-900 a day, and it's a long process to make them, it's hard to get flavor number one and flavor number seven out at the same time—it just doesn't work like that. So there is a delay. They eventually all get made but they never know how many of which kind they're going to have at one time.

### **Angella St. Romain**

39:06

#### **Making king cakes in large numbers; changes in the bakery business**

Gambino's hires a temporary crew every year. And that works out well. These people are each doing one job, it's repetitive. People can learn, but they find it challenging. People are always amazed by the process because they had no idea what goes into making a king cake. It takes about four hours from the time you start that dough to the time that king cake is ready to be put out. It's always the gold, green and purple. Angella doesn't know what the colors symbolize. She thinks that the purple is royalty, the green may be for wealth. She would have to look that

up. They have a history that they send out, that explains the history—this goes into their orders, and she says she will give one to LMG. Gambino's is on the map for king cakes, they are actually trademarked, "the King of King Cakes."

The bakery business just keeps growing. Just the internet itself has changed the way they have to do business and take orders. The day of the interview, there was a woman who had sent pictures of cakes ten minutes earlier over the internet, then walked in and asked, did you get my e-mail? They check e-mail a few times a day, but they're not sitting there monitoring the computer. The internet makes people expect things instantaneously. They were talking about getting their cell phones lines up with the internet, so they could answer. Angella is not exactly all for that, she is old school, doesn't want to take the romance out of it. By "romance," she means, just being able to talk to people, have that one-on-one with somebody. *"You build relationships with people, they're not just a customer, they're a lifelong client and they become friends and you see their children, and you do their wedding cake, and then their baby shower cakes, and then you do the first birthday cakes. And if you do that online it's just, you miss all that, you know?"*

### **Angella St. Romain**

41:46

#### **Working with weddings**

There are just three people at Gambino's Florida Boulevard store who are trained to work with brides. There is Paul, Ashley, and Angella. They're about to train a fourth girl to handle wedding cakes at the Perkins store. They love having Ashley—she's an asset to the company.

What are the things that you can teach employees? A lot of times, it's just understanding that customer's communication style, and asking open-ended questions, so you can get the customer to start talking about what they want. But you have to *listen*. I think too many people who are in sales want to talk. But it's kind of, just listen. They'll tell you what they want. You can go down the order form and ask them questions, and after a while you'll know exactly what they want on their cake and you'll have written it down. They have updated the order form over the years. They took out a bunch of the payment stuff—that can happen at the register. They need directions. They need to know what to do, not what not to do. Angella gives LMG an order form, to show how it works. [included with ephemera]

### **Angella St. Romain**

44:06

#### **Groom's cakes**

The traditional groom's cake, when she first started at Champagne's, was a German chocolate. Very seldom did they do anything else. *"It was almost always chocolate, mostly German chocolate. But now, it is anything. I mean, I've done liquor bottles, and I've done dogs, I've done dragons, I mean—I mean, books, the LSU stadium, that's another big one, very popular around here. We've done tigers—it's not limited to anything any more, it really isn't. And part of that is the Food Network. I've got to thank them. They had Ace of Cakes, [and the] Cake Boss guy. He didn't do anything different than any other bakers were ever doing, but he put it on television.*

*And people now thought, oh wow, I wonder if my local bakers could do that? And they were surprised, when they would start going to their local bakers, and you actually could do that.” It’s hard to advertise that. Once they see photos of what they have done, it gives them ideas. Nowadays, girls will come in with their cell phones with pictures from Pinterst, or the internet, and say, 'Can you do this?' Yes, we can. They bring in photos of the groom's dog or boat, and they do that. Angella always, asks, how far do you want to go with it? We can do anything, so how far do you want to go with it and what's your budget?*

**Angella St. Romain**

46:18

### **Sculpted cakes, grooms' cakes**

The six-foot alligator cake she made for the Ice Gators—it took 21 layers of full-size sheet cakes to get this thing. It was a three-dimensional alligator. She remembers Paul, who now works with her at Gambino's and was the catering director at the Cajun Dome at the time, walked into the kitchen and said, "What is that?" She had to build the internal part a certain way, so it wouldn't implode, because it was so big. She had to do the cake on the table it would be presented on, so they could roll it down the hall—you couldn't transport it. It was a big alligator, three-dimensional, was wearing his jersey and holding the hockey stick. She airbrushed it, let Paul help, and he had fun with it. This was for a big party, she thinks they were celebrating an anniversary or something, so they wanted something special. She feels lucky because she has been able to do some of these fun projects—she doesn't even call it work because it is so much fun, it's playing.

Basically, you start out with square cake and you get your shape by cutting and layering. You have to know when it's time to support. And you have to take into consideration, okay, these people have to be able to cut it. It should be four or five inches tall at the most, before you put the next cake board, so that when they cut it, it stops and they can serve it. That's a challenge that people miss out on. She has taught a lot of people a lot of things. She points out that this is something that people are going to eat. She acknowledges that some people present styrofoam cakes and then serve little pieces out of the kitchen. Angella considers that cheating. People do it all over—she thinks it's cheating.

LMG says she has seen photos and wonders how people even go about cutting the cake? If it's done correctly, there should be a cake plate when people slice down, every four or five inches, so that you can cut a piece to fit on a dessert plate. Usually they work with caterers, who cut the cake, and they know how to cut the cake. The groom's cake is presented at the same time the wedding cake is presented. Are there any rituals associated with the grooms' cakes? Usually, the groomsmen go around and toast to something, the groom's cake and stuff, and they usually make it fun, have a good time with it.

**Angella St. Romain**

49:39

### **Themes on grooms' cakes**

They can represent the groom's profession or hobbies. LMG saw one that was a ball and chain.

Angella says they laugh because often the mothers of the bride will be there, and the grooms will want something like that, and they'll get vetoed real quick. And sometimes Angella wonders whether the groom isn't just messing with his future mother-in-law. The tradition in Breaux Bridge was for the godmother to order and cut the groom's cake at the receptions. But she has had grooms call and ask for a private appointment; the brides are getting their cakes with them, and so they want their own appointment. And they treat it just like a bridal appointment. He doesn't want her to know. Angella will ask, is she going to be mad about this? Sometimes the bride'll call and say, 'Okay, just tell me, is it tacky or not?' Angella says, well of course not—we're not going to make something [tacky]. *"And you know, there's a fine line, we know how to gear those grooms, it's kind of like, 'Listen, this is your wedding day, you don't want to start on a bad note.'"* The bakery is right in the middle of it. [In the background, the recording picks up Paul Scelfo greeting customers, gives a sense of the congenial ambiance of Gambino's.]

### **Angella St. Romain**

51:11

#### **Cake in people's lives**

LMG: cake seems to be an important part in peoples lives. *"You know, bakery purchases are kind of an emotional purchase. You come in to celebrate something. And it could be a doctor's appointment for a child. They just got a shot, and mama's trying to appease them with a cookie or a cupcake. You know? And I think small-town bakeries, or small, neighborhood bakeries—and I consider us a small neighborhood bakery. I mean we do a lot of business, but we're still very much a part of the community. And people remember those things, they remember—you know, as you grow old, you remember, oh you remember—like, the little pink cookies from Champagne's Bakery. There isn't anyone in Breaux Bridge that doesn't know what a pink cookie is, or the surrounding areas. You know, Gambino's, it's the king cakes, it's the Doberge cakes. It's kind of like, oh, man, I remember those Doberge cakes from Gambino's. If one day we were just gone? People would miss that. It's part of our culture, it's part of what we're used to, as just, local people, you know? And I really do believe that, I think it's something, it brings back—'cause you walk in and there's the smells, and the sights, and then you've got the taste. So it reinforces you on a lot of levels, you know? So, it's a good business to be in, I can honestly say that."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

52:40

#### **Change and continuity in the bakery business over the years**

What changes has Angella seen over the years in the bakery business? There are a lot of trends that happen. Like gluten free is a big thing now. It's all over everywhere. Gambino's doesn't do any gluten-free products, we're not that kind of bakery. For the most part, people want a special treat every now and then, even if they can't do it all the time. They're willing to let loose for a birthday, or anniversary or special occasion. Angella likes that.

There has been a lot of change in the technology in the way we decorate cakes, in the way we take orders and how people communicate with us. That's changed a lot because of the internet and just social media as a whole—there are pictures everywhere. Great cake artists that are

able to show their work everywhere. Great advertising potentials—before you could just put a picture of one cake in the newspaper, now you have a whole website to brand your business and sell your wares. That kind of thing has all changed. She thinks it has changed for the good.

What hasn't changed? People. Except more of people wanting things right now. *"People still come in and they're happy and they want something sweet, they want a treat. They're pleasant to deal with and you're pleasant back, and it's a good day. . . . We sell cakes for a living, geez, what's not to like?"* They have people who come in on a regular basis, the staff will know what kind of cookie they want. They're people who live or work nearby and you know what they will want, they know what they're looking for. That's the beauty of having the small-town feel, that's part of it. She likes that a lot.

### **Angella St. Romain**

55:14

#### **Baton Rouge and cakes**

What is it about Baton Rouge and cakes? *"For a city this size, we have a lot of good bakeries and there are more and more popping up. If you travel to other parts of the country, you'll find people who bake cakes at home, or small boutique type shops. But Baton Rouge has some good, longstanding bakeries that have been around for a long time, and we all do a good job. You just don't find that anywhere else, you really don't."* Why is that? *"It's not easy work. It's long hours and it's not a lot of money, it really isn't. We do fine, it's not that, but you're not going to become a mutli-millionaire, it's not going to happen, because it's so much labor involved. And you really have to be passionate about what you're doing to stay in it any length of time. And you have to understand, you're going to be on your feet, you're going to work weekends, you're going to work holidays. And lot of people don't want to give that up. And so, they'll open a bakery because they think it's all glamorous and everything else. Well, the first time you miss a holiday, guess what? You're out of business. That's what we work for—we're working when everybody else is playing. So it takes a certain kind of crazy personality, I guess, to do this kind of business, you know?"*

Why does Baton Rouge have so many bakeries? *"I think part of it is, we're still—the South is still very family-oriented. I really do, I think that that just says it all around here. We still go to church, we still have family dinners, we still celebrate holidays, we still enjoy birthdays and having the family and friends over. I mean, food is a big thing here in Louisiana all the way around, and sweets are definitely part of it, you know? And sometimes it's not even a bakery sweet, it might just be mom's old coconut cake or something, but it's definitely part of our culture here, you know, part of that family gathering. We still enjoy family gatherings, and everything that goes along with that. And bakeries and desserts, and just things that bring dear memories are all part of it."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

58:05

#### **Changes in cake-buying traditions**

LMG says that her grandmother wouldn't dream of buying a bakery cake (Angella says her

mother was the same way), she made her own and giving a bakery cake almost seemed a little impersonal, rather than taking the time to make one. Now, with so many women working outside the home, a bakery cake seems like a special treat. What is Angella's take on that? Angella agrees. She grew up in a household where they couldn't afford a bakery cake. They baked at home. She knew how to bake at her house, her mother taught her to do cakes from scratch when she was probably about seven years old. Now everyone is working and you just don't have time or the skills. Angella purposely taught her daughters to cook and bake. They thought she was crazy, but now they do it for fun. Her oldest daughter will sometimes bake a cake with her five-year-old daughter for fun, but doesn't have time to bake for special occasions—she'll call Angella and ask her to bring something. On a rainy afternoon, she might make cupcakes with her little girl, but she can't commit to making special occasion cakes, so they'll call Angella and ask her to bring things. She thinks it's the same for a lot of the customers. She knows a lot of younger people now don't even know how to bake from scratch. She thinks that in the South, they still try to teach those fundamental things. Angella was a woman of the 1970s, so she tried to do it all. It was hard to do and be all that you wanted to do and be, it was hard at times.

LMG: the bakeries might be filling in a gap? Angella thinks so. The younger generation are getting back to some basics, like on shows like *Pioneer Woman*, and they're starting to realize just some of the things we do as families. The DIY movement also has an impact on people learning to bake again. You can look anything up on Youtube these days.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:00:53

#### **Angella's passion for the bakery business**

What keeps Angella in the bakery business, in spite of the long hours, etc.? She still really enjoys decorating cakes, and she likes teaching. She has taught a lot of people—she'll say to a protégé, 'Did you ever think of doing it that way?' 'Oh my God, Miss Angella, that's so much easier.' With the staff, she is with them as much as she is her own family, they start to feel like they are her children almost, so she wants to mold them, show them everything she knows, so that they can take it further. She likes to see people succeed. Everything she knows, she tries to impart to the next generation, because she can only do this so much longer. Angella doesn't come in till 6:30 now, but she has a baker who comes in at 3:00. Every now and then his assistant doesn't make it, so she gets there at 4:00 or 5:00. She's done that before. That's what made her decide not to do bread—you have to get there at midnight to have the bread ready at 7:00 am and it's a very slow process, with the rising. It's not for her!

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:02:30

#### **Seasonal cakes**

They make king cakes out of season, when they have orders. The only time they put them out is during Mardi Gras. But at Easter time, she'll make cakes with the same icing and dough, with the colored sugars in spring colors. LMG admires cupcakes with "grass" made from icing. They are done with a special tip that has a bunch of little holes punched in it and you pull it up real

quick.

Are there seasonal cakes for Easter? They do an Easter parfait cake, where they tint the layers, which is fun. Color is everywhere, so people like those fun colors. It's an almond cake and they tint the layers before they bake it. They make a wonderful coconut cake—with four thin layers of cake and three layers of coconut filling, and then the white butter cream with the coconut all on the outside. It's probably one of Angella's favorites. Talking about the coconut cream pie, she says their custard is so good, she would put their cream pies up against anybody else's. They are excellent.

### **Angella St. Romain**

*1:04:19*

#### **Wedding cake deliveries**

Gambino's delivers most of the wedding cakes. Every so often people get brave and pick them, which makes her so nervous. It's as if the cake is her baby, until it's set up on the table and ready to be shown to everyone. She tells a story about a couple of young men who picked up a cake the other day—it was a pretty large cake, a three-tier with a 16" bottom tier. They came in a truck, with seats folding back in the front. She showed them how to hold it, and she said, "Are you sure you don't want me to deliver this?" She had him pick it up, to show him how to hold it, and told him not to slam on his breaks—start slowing down and stopping a block before the red light and stop sign. She gave him her cell number and had him call her when he had it on the table. So he did and it was fine. Because she would have wondered until she heard from him.

She has a delivery driver who has been delivering cakes for Gambino's for years. They've shown him how to fix things if anything happens. Every so often he'll call and say, there's an air bubble. An air bubble will happen sometimes if there is a change in temperature. The air bubble will poke out on the icing. You have to poke a hole in it, and you take a piece of paper towel and flatten it back out and you can't even tell it was there. There are tricks to the trade.

### **Angella St. Romain**

*1:06:33*

#### **LMG asks about legends or lore in the business**

She doesn't know of any legends, but she shares a story of Mr. Champagne's uncle, Marcel, who was one of the bakers who showed her how to do things. He was the cookie guy. This bakery was meticulous about where they put things. He had this tin measuring cup, and had four or five rungs where they hung measuring spoons, etc. And his deal was, everything has a place and a place for everything. One morning she walked in at 6:00 am, she was a teenager, and he threw the tin cup at her. She asked him what was going on, and she had put the measuring cup in the wrong place—a few inches to the right or left of where it was supposed to be. She learned such a valuable lesson—he shouldn't have had to look for it. You could grab the wrong thing and mess up a recipe. He had been working there so long, so he didn't have to look for it, shouldn't have to look up from his work. Everything was within reach. Angella has her kitchen at home the same way, everything is within reach. At Gambino's, it's much bigger and there are more people to manage. They don't always get it, why things need to be where



people can find them, so she'll say, okay, who's got the \_\_\_? Mr. Marcel was a very kind gentleman, but he taught her a valuable lesson when he threw that cup at her.

## **Angella St. Romain**

1:08:47

### **Cake Disaster stories**

Every bakery has disaster stories—trust me! Traffic is not always at its best. She remembers delivering a cake with lemon filling on the bottom tier. Someone cut in front of her and she slammed on her brakes, and the top layer of the cake slid. She knew what had happened, so she pulled over, took the cake and picked it up, and slid it forward saying, if it can slide forward, it can slide back. It was a far delivery, and she had all the icing and stuff. She got to the facility and she thought the chef was going to have a heart attack, and he said, oh my God, what are you going to do, they'll be here in an hour. And she said, I don't have time to panic, hold on. She had him get her a cart, and she brought the cake into the building, and she stripped down the cake and reused the same icing, redecorated the cake and no-one else ever knew. She always travels with a tool bag kit—with a little bucket of icing, spatulas, decorating supplies. It looks like a fishing tackle kit. LMG jokes about a cake first aid kit.

Angella says it was funny, because after it was over, then she went weak in the knees. The chef said, 'Can I get you anything?' She said she would like a stiff drink but she had to drive home. Now I can panic! The chef was amazed, saying, I've never seen anybody do that. *"But you just handle it."* You have to have a cool head. At a time like that, with the bride coming in an hour and you don't want to disappoint her, you have to keep it together. That doesn't happen often but when it does you just have to handle it. Thomas is the delivery guy, Angella trusted him with her daughters' wedding cakes. He'll get them there on time, drives slow, doesn't worry about people honking at him. If there's a problem, if there's a problem he'll call, offer to bring it back or tell her she needs to come to the site. She'll say, 'How bad is it?' He knows her scale—whether she needs to come, or have the cake brought back to the bakery etc. They prefer to deliver, absolutely.

If someone picks up the cake, then Gambino's is not responsible, but they still care. People drop cakes, etc. She tells the story of a best man who came and picked up the cake, not a big one. When he brought it back, it was destroyed, they couldn't figure out what he had done. It was late, they didn't have much time. She said, okay, this is what we're going to do. They gave him a dummy cake, styrofoam, to put on the table, to take pictures with, then got out a sheet cake and iced it so they would have something to serve. And Angella said, *"You're going to owe them. Not me, but them. Because this is not the cake she wanted."* They dressed it up as much as they could, to make it look like what the bride wanted. Angella told him to tell the bride, do not try to serve this. She gave him two pieces, so they could pretend to cut the cake and taste it, during that part of the reception. But it was a styrofoam cake—like the ones on display in the bakery. The ones on the wall. The icing is real but the base is styrofoam.

[Mr. Paul comes in to ask a question. He is joking around. He talks about how Angella grew up on the banks of the Bayou Tesche, fishing, crawfishing, and enjoying the local neighborhoods.

Paul talks about how the Bayou Tesche is the waterway that opened SW Louisiana up to all the commerce for the area. Anything that came up through Acadiana, came up through the waterways, the Achafalya Basin, because they couldn't do overland delivery. That's where Angella grew up.]

Angella and Paul have worked together a long time, in one way or another.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:15:42

#### **Memorable groom's cakes**

Angella describes one of the most memorable groom's cakes she has done. It was a big dog with a spike collar on him and he was sitting down, probably two and a half feet tall, huge, a rottweiler. And they had Angella put him as if he were guarding the wedding cake. It was funny because from afar, it was like, is that a dog? It was very comical. She got rave reviews, she had them bring a lot of photos ahead of time, so she could get the markings right, because people are very personal with their dogs. And they nailed it.

Another fun one was a dragon she did for someone. It was a jade green, glittery, it was magical. It was three dimensional. It just worked.

She did an old blue antique car that was lots of fun to do. She thinks that Paul could get me a photos—she doesn't know if she can get me the dog because she did it so long ago. There have been so many fun projects she has worked on. She thinks they have photos of the dragon and the antique car; the Rottweiler was a long time ago. It is okay to use these photos for the essays. [Prior to the interview, Paul took LMG back into the kitchen to watch an employee frosting a Doberge cake. LMG asks the name of the employee; it is Pat, Patricia, but Angella can't think of her last name as she married. LMG later had her fill out a release form.]

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:17:58

#### **Doberge cakes; shipping cakes**

The Doberge cake is a Gambino's tradition. [It is pronounced DOE-bosh, but Angella pronounced it doe-BAYRJ, as it would be pronounced in French.] Other bakeries make Doberge, but most would use a product that is already prepared, like pudding in a bucket, not very good. Gambino's makes little Doberge squares—it's the same cake and the same custard filling, but with two layers. But the whole cake has the six layers. The custard is the same custard they use for their cream pies, but they do a chocolate, vanilla, and lemon custards. It's the custards that make it—*"that's our signature, it really is."* They can ship the Doberge cakes by freezing them and packing them in dry ice. They just got some new containers in—these are specialty containers, made for this purpose.

Mr. Sam Scelfo's son has graduated from college and joined the business, and he is helping with all the new technology. She says to Mr. Sam, it's time to let the young people take over—they know all the technology, they have new ideas. He is not ready to hand over the reins, but

Angella says it is so important to have their feedback, to them on board, because their clients are largely thirty-year-olds. They're the ones with families, people having babies and families and birthday parties. This son is near New Orleans, in Kenner. Angella's daughters were not interested in carrying it on. But they are all happily married and have college degrees. They say that they didn't have any choice about that. Those were her two prayers for her daughters, and she made that happen, and they worked hard. She never wanted them to have to marry, but she is glad that they are happily married. But she thinks that there's something to be said for maintaining a little independence, to know that you can do anything.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:21:20

#### **Qualities of a good cake**

Their job is to make the cakes look good but what about the inside? What are the hallmarks of quality? *"That's where it all starts. If you can't bake a good cake—especially a wedding cake. A wedding cake, it has to be tender, and yet, the crumb on it has to be very fine. So that when you're cutting that piece of cake, it's not full of big air holes, and yet still be very tender and light. It shouldn't have any dark spots on it, it should all be a beautiful color. And to me, a perfect piece of cake looks beautiful when it's cut, you know? As it lays on that plate, it should have symmetrical layers. It should be filled with the right amount of filling. And the icing shouldn't be two inches on one side and a half-inch on another."*

She has seen some awful things that people have done with cakes, and she says, you have to consider that this is going to be served and eaten, even a sculpted cake. So you don't want to put anything that's not edible or coherent with what's going on. Her bakers know you have use cold ingredients, because that makes a difference on the texture. *"And I can cut into a cake and tell you if you used cold ingredients or not. And he knows that I know that! So, it's not even a question now. You can tell from the top of a cake, you can see the air bubbles."* He'll start with cold ingredients and then leave the cake out for a while, so she tells him to get the cake into the oven. She keeps an eye on everything. She seldom is in one place very long, because she is always running around and watching. She said, people are people and they're going to take the least line of resistance, so she needs to keep encouraging them to keep the quality up. That's why she doesn't like the styrofoam cakes—what's the point? *"We have not only beautiful cakes, we have good cakes. They taste very good."*

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:24:19

#### **Reflecting on her career**

Angella feels fortunate. She gets up in the morning and most of the time, she never regrets having to come to work. *"It's what I was meant to do."* Sundays are her definite day off. Every now and then, she takes a half day on Tuesdays, leaves early. But she enjoys what she is doing, she can be creative when she wants to. There are times when it gets frustrating, when she doesn't have time to make happen what she wanted to make happen, so she tries again next year.

Quality is very important to her and it's hard to impart that to the staff. She tells them they have to go above what the customers want. Her goal is to give them more than they think they know they're getting, and you'll have a client forever. They have a good following. How about their relationship with the other bakeries in town? They have good relationships with them. They borrow products from each other. It's a friendly business, all the way around. She has no qualms about calling another bakery and asking if they have strawberries or sugar, when she is running low. They call on each other. There is enough business for all of them to do well.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:26:46

#### **Home cake decorating**

A lot of people want to be home decorators now. They have Cottage Laws in Louisiana, where people can do cakes at home and up to \$50,000 of business a year, and it's not a problem. The only thing is, she feels they have an unfair advantage, because they don't have to worry about Board of Health regulations and they can work at home. She has even had one of them come over to borrow a dummy cake because their cake didn't quite make it to the reception. Angella is fine with that because in the end, you put yourself in that bride's place, and she's got to have something. It's not going to cost me anything to let her borrow one of these dummy cakes to take pictures of.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:27:46

#### **Relationships with customers**

They try to maintain relationships with customers over time. Some move away. Some come and say, oh can I have a white almond cake like my wedding cake was, shipped to me, it was so good. One girl told her, after she moved to Denver, my God they just don't know how to bake over here. She said the cakes look beautiful, but it didn't taste like anything. So they ship to these customers.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:28:27

#### **Freezing the top layer of the wedding cake**

Gambino's tells people exactly how to do freeze the cake. You have to know how to do it. You have to freeze it, let the icing get hard, just overnight. Then wrap it very well with many layers of saran, then you put it back in the box, so it doesn't pick up other "flavors" in the freezer. She doesn't know where the tradition came from, but it has always been done, for as long as she knows. The Champagnes taught her to do this, how to freeze the cake and give the bride a box to put it in. That's something Angella wants to develop, is a special box for that top tier. She has told Sam Scelfo, the owner, this, and he has told her, okay, go ahead. She is looking at designs, and has to find someone to manufacture it—she wants it to be plastic, not a cardboard box. Like tupperware, so you can really seal it, and protect it if something falls on it.

Angella has a soft spot in her heart for the bride. It's a big day, and a ton of money. It's the most expensive party your parents or you will ever throw. As a bakery, you really have an

opportunity to create a relationship with someone for years to come. *"At the end of the day, it's a good job, it's a good job to have. I'm glad it found me!"*

**Angella St. Romain**

1:30:52

**Wedding cake trends; doing bridal shows**

Do they change out the dummy cakes to keep up with the trends. At this time of year, it's hard because they are in the middle of doing bridal shows and weddings, it's that time of year. Right now, they're seeing a lot of metallic colors coming in, lots of lace, that vintage style. Even the homemade icing look where it's just kind of spatulaed on—that's very in for people that like burlap and things, people are wanting things to be natural. People do burlap ribbon on things, mason jars—that's a big trend, so they get a lot of people who say, I don't want all that fancy stuff, I just want it to look like it was made at home. But I don't want to make it at home. Angella says, it's oaky, we can do that.

For the bridal shows, they'll bring display cakes and bridal pamphlets and things. And they'll serve little soufflé cups for people to taste the cake. They set up appointments at that time, if people want. And try to give them an overview of what they do at Gambino's. The shows usually start at the beginning of the year, because a lot of brides get engaged over Christmas, so they are *shopping*. They'll go to The Knot, a big wedding website. Gambino's has won the Knot Award for Baton Rouge. People contact Gambino's via The Knot, or they just come and check them out. They have gotten appointments out of the bridal shows. The shows are a money-maker for the companies that put them on, because they charge the businesses to participate, for advertising, etc. And it's good to network with the other wedding vendors, too, like clothing and catering. They have a few caterers in town who highly recommend them because they have done enough business with them, they know they'll get it there on time, it's going to be done right, there won't be problems, so they've built those kinds of relationships with people.

**Angella St. Romain**

1:33:57

**Working weddings**

The pressure is there—the deadlines are many!

How does it work? How many consults do they have with the bride? Usually, they come in at least twice. The first time they come in and they think they know what they want, and then as the wedding gets closer, they may have changed colors or styles, as far as the dress, the flowers. It depends on where they are in the process when they come to Gambino's. If they have their flowers picked out already when they come to Gambino's, they usually only come once. If they haven't done that yet, usually there's more than one. [Paul comes by, he is going to do the bridal appointment at another table.] So, they do a tasting, let them taste the different types of cake, fillings and icings.

**Angella St. Romain**

1:35:20

### **Cake icing, kinds and techniques**

One thing that's come around since Angella has been in the business is fondant. She points out a dummy cake with fondant, the icing is kind of draped, which you can't do with butter cream. Fondant is 99% sugar, with a little bit of shortening, gelatin, water, caro syrup—that's fondant. She calls it sugar playdough because that's what it's like. They buy it commercially, because it's time consuming to make and very rough on the hands, because it's like bread dough, but it's a lot thicker. You roll the fondant out like pie dough. You ice your cake with a good layer of butter cream first, so you have that nice, soft palatable icing next to your cake. And you roll the fondant out; Gambino's rolls it out thinner than pie dough. It doesn't taste bad, but it has a different texture than butter cream. After you roll it out, you lay it on top of the butter cream and just smooth it out. It allows you to do things, like creating a fabric effect.

She tells the story of a time when she was doing a cake for a couple in Atlanta, and the cake was kind of spread out and she draped the fondant like fabric and the florist came and put roses on it and it was very beautiful and soft and feminine. And there was a couple at the reception and when they saw Angella cut into the cake, they were surprised that the fondant layer was edible—they thought it was actual fabric draped over the cake. At that time, fondant was very new and kind of mysterious. It's one of those products that came around that Mrs. Champagne didn't work with. She used butter cream and royal icing and meringue.

But the fondant and the lace molds have changed the way we do things. Royal icing is old-fashioned icing, basically egg whites, powdered sugar and a little cream of tartar, to help it dry. You would pipe whatever you wanted and then you would let it dry, then pick it up and put it on the cake. You could curve it if you let it dry on a curved surface, and then you would pick it up and you could extend it off of the edges of your cake. They used to make roses on nails and for Christmas they would start making royal icing in July, so they would have enough to be able to pop them on the cake real quick, because you had so many orders. They air dry. This was at Champagne's. They're crunchy, where the fondant stays soft and pliant on the cake. A lot of people say they don't like it. Angella thinks it's not the taste they don't like, but the texture. It's soft and gummy, kind of like chewing gum. Not something that you want on your palate very long.

The Doberge is iced with a different product called poured fondant. It's an icing that is liquid and you heat it up, get it to a certain temperature, so that once it flows onto that butter cream icing it will harden to a point, but not to the point where it'll crack. That's been around forever. Gambino's makes this icing themselves, with the original recipe from Beulah Ledner. There's a lot more involved than what meets the eye, as far as knowing the different types of [tools and techniques], and in knowing what to use in what application.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:39:51

### **More on the Doberge; Shipping cakes**

The Doberge cake layers are baked individually. Sometimes they take a thicker layer and cut it

in half. Sometimes, if she wants fifteen layers and they only made her ten, then she'll split them. The dough for the Doberge is the yellow butter vanilla cake, because the yellow and the chocolate marry so well together. It's a good mellow flavor. And then six layers of custard, and then they ice it with a good layer of butter cream—either chocolate or white butter cream for the lemon. And then they pour the flavored fondant over it. It's a good cake, it really is.

How do you do the layers and frosting for the half-and-half (half lemon-half chocolate) cakes? Very carefully! For the mixed cakes, you have to remember which side has the chocolate and which has the white. When you are making it and filling it, you have to be aware of which side is which, not turn the cake. When you ice it, that's your real mark. Gambino's decorators are really good with their spatulas and they know how to do it. They'll start in the center line and work outward, so lemon on the left, for example.

She has worked at bakeries where they made a whole chocolate cake and a whole lemon one and just cut it down the middle and stick them together. But there again, you can do this, you can make this work. The problem with baking two cakes and cutting them in half is, for one thing, if one cake is lower than the other, it just looks funny. And then you have to put a big border down the center. The cake layers are all the same, it's just the custard and the icing that's different. The classic flavors are chocolate and lemon. They have since added a caramel and a strawberry. Mr. Paul told LMG that the Doberge is the official birthday cake of New Orleans. Angella confirms that this is true. Gambino's has been doing them for a long time.

Talking about the history of this cake, Angella says that the way they spell it, it's Doberge. When she worked at the other bakery, it was a dobache torte, so there's a relation there. She has seen it spelled dobash. There are a number of different spellings. Doberge was Beulah Ledner's terminology and spelling—it has a French influence to it. Angella doesn't know what Ledner's cultural background was, but she invented it—it was her custard and icing recipes. And Gambino's bought it.

When do people buy a Doberge cake? They'll buy the for birthdays and holidays, Christmas—it's a bit of a high end cake, rather than a \$25 birthday cake, it's a \$40 cake. But it's so rich—six layers of cake. It barely fits on the dessert plate sometimes, because that's a lot of cake. But when people are celebrating something, they don't mind spending a little more for it. They could ship it out—order early in December. Angella understands that it arrives frozen in the cold weather, which is perfect because you can then leave it out or put it in the fridge. They make it the day of or the day before shipment, freeze it overnight, and then they ship it with dry ice. They don't ship the cream pies.

Angella says, when you are shipping a cake, it's all about the packaging. For years, they just had the insulated styrofoam block with the hole in it. That worked okay, sometimes. But sometimes if it was 90 degrees outside, it didn't quite hold up, the cakes slid, and it wasn't a good presentation. But then, Sam's son came in and he said, the first thing I want to do is find out how we can ship this Doberge cake better. That was his first project. It took a while to find the right materials, including the dry ice, because Gambino's doesn't have the freezers to hold dry

ice. So they had to find a supplier in New Orleans for the dry ice; the Doberge cakes are all shipped from New Orleans because of that, they have the suppliers lined up. It was probably a six-month project before he got it right, with lots of trial and error. Lots of people out there got free Doberge cakes, just, 'How did it arrive? Send me pictures!'

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:46:15

#### **Intergenerational learning and collaboration**

You have to keep innovating. Angella and Sam laugh about being the older generation. She jokes about the technical knowledge, that she can learn but it takes longer for her to learn. The next generation understands, and conversely, it takes them a while to develop the experience. *"And he absolutely appreciates that, he understands it takes us all—there's some things that I know that it's gonna take him ten years to understand why that's important. But like any business that's going to be passed on, that's what it's all about, trying to impart that knowledge for the next generation. 'Cause it's a good feeling to know that you're part of an industry that has longevity like that. You know, and very personal. I mean, you know, like the Champagnes, when Paul took over his dad's business, after the divorce and everything else, they had reopened, and he didn't open up retail, he just did wholesale bread and stuff. And then Paul opened up the retail again. And he called me, he said, 'Miss Angie,' he said, 'I have o ask you some questions, I'm thinking about opening up the bakery.' And it just felt so good to be part of that, you know? Just kind of like, 'Oh Paul, I'm so happy! It's going to be open again. Pink cookies—yeah!' You know?"* They were closed for a good ten years. But he was still doing wholesale bread. Breaux Bridge is a small community, about 10,000 people or less, so everyone knew the family. *"You don't want to see those little gems die off, you really don't."* She feels that way about Gambino's, that she wants to see it keep going. *"And with all the new businesses popping up, and that's wonderful, I welcome them all, I'll help anybody. But you don't want those old stable ones go away."*

LMG talks about how different it was for her wedding, that the venue was a full-service restaurant, that they did the cakes, that she didn't have the array of choices that a bakery would offer, so it was a different experience. Angella says that's popular, because people are so busy, they don't have time to go to ten different professionals. Gambino's has about four places that use them for their bridal packages, which works out well. These are smaller venues, so the cakes are usually easy, small three-tier cakes and stuff. It makes it nice for a bride who's from out of town, because she doesn't know where to go, unless she has a recommendation from someone.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:49:38

#### **Grooms' cakes, regional differences in cakes**

It was the godmother who did the groom's cake—that's how it was where Angella grew up, in Breaux Bridge, which she still considers home. She says, when you cross the Achafalaya Basin, you're in a whole different world! She remembers when she moved to Baton Rouge, people would order the white butter cream icing as the filling. She didn't do ten of those the whole



time when she was in the Breaux Bridge/Lafayette area. And it's good, she's not saying it isn't, but back home they like fruit and nuts and things like that for a filling.

Are there special ingredients in the Baton Rouge area, special flour, etc.? No, not really, they all use the same vendors and everything, same ingredients. Angella thinks that the tradition of using fruit and nuts in a cake filling may come from the French heritage with its heavy aesthetic, "the more, the better." Baton Rouge is getting to be blended a little more. You kind of had New Orleans, which was the big foodie area, and then you had Lafayette, another big foodie area. Baton Rouge was not involved as much, but now it is. But for years, you didn't come to Baton Rouge for that, you came for LSU football. LMG mentions that Maida Owens says that she has heard people from New Orleans talk about how great the cakes are from Baton Rouge. Angella responds, "It's possible."

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:51:41

#### **Closing**

*"I think you can tell, I really, I honestly can say, I really enjoy what I'm doing, I really do. It's funny, when you live a life and it's kind of like, it is what it is. You just . . . oh, okay."* And this is without trying, she has absorbed the information—someone asks her a question and she can answer that, and she doesn't know when someone taught her that and she retained it. *"I'm one of those curious people, I always want to know how and okay, how do you do that? Hold on—let me figure that out."* She is free with her advice, she wants to share what she knows, so she'll never be rich.

She tells a story about how when she was in the finance business, and she and a friend used to make "Faberge eggs" from goose eggs that they gathered in the country. This was so she could have a creative outlet. They sold their eggs at craft fairs, etc. An older retired gentleman stopped by their booth, asked if they would show him how to do it. They did, and he eventually took it to another level through marketing and made a lot of money. He doesn't give them credit, but Angella doesn't care. They knew how to do it, how to enjoy it, have a creative outlet. And he knew how to make money.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:55:40

#### **Gambino's Birthday Club**

LMG notices a sign for the Birthday Club, asks what it is. People give them their name and address, and every month they give away a couple of free birthday cakes. They send out reminders—'Last year in May you were in here buying a birthday cake for John, and we're just letting you know, it's John's birthday again this year.' People really like that reminder, oh yeah, it's John at the office's birthday again this year. So that is a good little marketing tool that works well.

### **Angella St. Romain**

1:56:40

**Gambino's food lines**

Mr. Scelfo has a whole food line, a separate corporation from the bakery, through which he markets French breads and such, including olive salad that is sold in jars, for muffuletta sandwich. The olive salad is used as a dressing on that sandwich. The sandwich is layered with Italian meats and cheeses. Gambino's makes the olive salad and sells it throughout the country.

**Angella St. Romain**

1:57:37

**Cream mints**

LMG notices containers of pastel wafers in the display. These are cream mints, in Easter colors. They are very popular—a hot seller for the weddings. They do a lot of white ones for weddings, sometimes with the couple's initials monogrammed on them, as party favors. They come in different colors—they play with them, sometimes put them on the side of a cake, as a decoration. They make these in New Orleans and the BR store purchase from them. The New Orleans store is a much bigger facility, so they do a lot more over there. Angella says there are about five of her at the New Orleans store.

**Angella St. Romain**

1:58:46

Angella talks to a customer who comes in and sees LMG interviewing her, they joke around.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

**END OF RECORDING**