

LIFESTYLE

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A “king cake” at Ukrop’s Kitchen facility in Chesterfield.

ALLYSE PULLIAM
PHOTOS, TIMES-DISPATCH



TAKE the CAKE

Ukrop’s Bakery colorful king cakes are sold at supermarkets throughout the region

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Richmond Times-Dispatch

Mardi Gras is coming up — the holiday falls on Tuesday Feb. 17 this year. Time to start thinking about getting a king cake from the grocery store.

The king cake traces its roots to ancient Roman Saturnalia and medieval European epiphany traditions, later shaped by French customs and carried to Louisiana, where it became a staple of New Orleans Mardi Gras.

The ring-shaped cake symbolizes the journey of the Three Kings and is associated with luck and celebration. Hidden inside is a bean or tiny baby figurine representing the Christ child — whoever finds it is crowned “king” for the day and is tasked with hosting the next gathering.

In Richmond, the king cake tradition is alive and well at Ukrop’s Bakery’s commercial kitchen, where king cakes are being made now through Feb. 17.

King cakes are available at Ukrop’s Market Hall, Kroger, Food Lion and Libbie Market.

The colorful confections are made from Danish dough with cinnamon filling, and are rolled and twisted into a ring shape before they are baked in commercial ovens.

After they’re baked, they are dropped into paper trays, then iced and topped with purple, green, and gold sugar. These colors represent justice, faith and power, respectively. The Ukrop’s cakes include a baby Jesus made of icing sugar instead of a plastic one (which is less of a choking hazard).

Glenn Cobb, general manager for Ukrop’s Bakery for 37 years, told me that his team produces around 800 cakes for the season, that are sold to Kroger, Food Lion and Libbie Market. Prices vary by retailer. At Ukrop’s Market Hall, they cost \$10.99.

“We actually put the Baby Jesus in on top of the cake,” said Cobb. “It is up to the person when they buy it, to hide it when they are going to serve it. If they have a party, then they hide it in the cake. And whoever gets that piece, it’s supposed to bring luck for the year.”

The cakes are assembled by groups of Ukrop’s employees who handle the process from start to finish — laying out the dough, assembling it into a twisted shape, baking it in the ovens, putting the baked Danish dough into paper trays, icing the bread and topping with the colorful sugar — which feels like a cross between powdered and granulated — not too gritty or too sweet, and melts in the mouth quickly.

Cobb said, “It’s made from cinnamon pecan ring dough, with cinnamon twisted in the dough — you can see the cinnamon inside. It tastes like a Danish coffee cake, obviously, with some sugar on top of a lot of sugar icing.”

The cakes come together in a jiff before they are distributed to supermarkets.

“The total time for making the dough to the finished product, probably looking at about five minutes of labor, total,” said Cobb. “They have a book (a tray) of dough, they sheet it out, and then you get 18 of them out of it. Then you have to proof it, bake it, ice it, decorate it, package it out. It takes somewhere around five minutes.”

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The ring-shaped king cake symbolizes the journey of the Three Kings and is associated with luck and celebration.



King cake babies, made of icing sugar instead of plastic, at Ukrop’s Kitchen facility in Chesterfield.



At Ukrop’s, the Baby Jesus is placed on top of the cake. When you buy a cake, you’re meant to hide it inside the cake and whoever finds it is “king” for the day.

Where to find king cakes:

Ukrop’s Market Hall
Address: 7250 Patterson Ave.
Hours: Tuesday to Saturday: 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Contact: ukropshomestylefoods.com or (804) 340-3040

Ukrop’s king cakes are also available at Kroger, Food Lion and Libbie Market

Where else can you get a king cake for Mardi Gras this year?

Montana Gold Bread Co.
Address: 3543 W. Cary St.
Hours: Monday to Saturday: 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Contact: montanagoldbread.com or (804) 359-7700

Sugar & Crumb Home Bakery
sugarcrumbs.com or (607) 377-4359

Early Bird Biscuit Co.
Address: 119 N. Robinson St.
Hours: Tuesday to Friday: 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Saturday: 7 a.m. to noon
Contact: earlybirdbiscuit.com or (804) 335-4570



These colors represent justice, faith and power.

VIEW: Watch king cakes being made at Ukrop’s Kitchen by pointing your smartphone camera at the QR code, then click the link. [NEWSVU](#)