



makethis

MINI STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKES

By Marge Perry

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Love is ... rich creamy cheesecake topped with homemade strawberry sauce. And, because we are every bit as much about self-love as the love we so generously give to others, these delights are quite simple to make. If you are pressed for time, take pleasure in the fact that you can make the topping in about 15 minutes (and as much as a week ahead or as little as 20 minutes before serving). The crusts also take only about 15 minutes, as does the filling (which also bakes for 35 to 40 minutes of unattended time). Be sure to make the cheesecakes at least a couple of hours before serving so they have time to cool in the refrigerator.

The cheesecakes are charming tokens of love whether made with Neufchâtel or full fat cream cheese; similarly, reduced fat or regular sour cream work beautifully. (Just don't use the fat free version of either one.)

INDIVIDUAL CHEESECAKES WITH STRAWBERRY TOPPING

1 ½ cups graham cracker crumbs



MARGE PERRY

1 ¼ cups sugar, divided
6 tablespoons butter, melted
1 pound Neufchâtel or cream cheese
1 ½ cups light or regular sour cream
3 large eggs
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

⅓ cup all-purpose flour
1 pound strawberries
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon cornstarch
¼ teaspoon orange zest

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 (12-cup) muffin pans

with paper liners; coat the liners lightly with cooking spray.

2. Combine the graham cracker crumbs, ¼ cup of the sugar and the butter. Firmly pat 1 heaping tablespoon into the bottom of each muffin cup liner. Bake until golden and firm, 5 to 6 minutes.

Allow to cool.

3. Combine the cream cheese and sour cream in a large bowl and beat with an electric mixer until smooth. Add the eggs, remaining 1 cup of sugar and vanilla, then beat again until smooth. Add the flour; beat on low speed until it is just combined. Pour the filling over the cooled crusts.

4. Bake 35 to 40 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out nearly clean. (The cheesecakes will rise and crack as they bake and fall as they cool.) Refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to 2 days.

5. Make the topping: Carefully remove the core from several strawberries and slice them lengthwise to form 24 heart shapes. Chop the remaining strawberries in ¼-inch pieces.

6. Combine the orange juice and chopped strawberries in a small saucepan and cook, stirring, over medium heat until the fruit softens, about 4 minutes. In a small bowl stir the cornstarch into 1 tablespoon of water until dissolved; stir the slurry into the strawberries and cook 1 minute until thickened. Remove from the heat and stir in the orange zest. Cool completely.

7. Spoon the sauce on top of each cheesecake and top with a strawberry slice. Brush the slices lightly with the sauce. Makes 24 servings.

Ben's Deli owner to 'step back' from chain

BY ERICA MARCUS

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Longtime Ben's Deli owner Ronnie Dragoon says he will "step back" from the chain of kosher delicatessens that he founded in 1972.

"My body isn't what it used to be. And I only know one way to work: hard," said Dragoon, 71.

The decision has not been easy. "It's hard to give up on what one has been doing for over 47 years, and doing it with love, passion, and dedication," he wrote on his "Ruminations & Ronnifications" blog.

Dragoon echoed the lament of many restaurant owners, adding that "the restaurant business is getting more difficult to navigate, and the

labor market is ever shrinking with less loyalty and caring." He also noted the increasing costs of litigation, insurance and rent.

He has not decided yet what he will do with the seven-restaurant business, whether to transfer ownership to the existing management team or find an outside buyer. He hopes to resolve the future of the business within the next few months.

Dragoon and his father, Ben Dragoon, opened the first Ben's (now closed) in Baldwin in 1972. Ronnie was the driving force but, as he told Newsday in 1999, "What kind of a kosher deli would be named Ronnie's? Ben's, Sam's, Harry's, those are kosher-deli names."

The last decade has not been kind

to the deli business, with Boomy's in Plainview, Bellcrest in Bellmore, Commack Kosher Meats, Deli King in New Hyde Park, Deli on Rye in Albertson and Delsen's in Bay Shore among the fallen. In 2014, Dragoon told Newsday, "Years ago, customers came in two and three times a week," in contrast to "today's norm" of once every two weeks. There's no question that diets change and tastes change."

In addition to his three local locations, Dragoon owns Ben's Delis in Manhattan, Bayside, Scarsdale and Boca Raton, Florida. On Long Island: 140 Wheatley Plaza, Greenvale, 516-621-3340, 59 Old Country Rd., Carle Place, 516-742-3354, 7971 Jericho Tpke., Woodbury, 516-496-4236, bensdeli.net



DANIEL BRENNAN

Pastrami sandwiches at Ben's Deli in Greenvale, one of the chain's seven locations.