

Kelly Kobus' Life is a Piece O' Cake

BY: LARRY O'CONNOR, 11/3/2010



At 25, Kelly Kobus, a 2003 [Lansing Catholic High](#) grad, is already three years into running [A Piece O' Cake](#), a flourishing gourmet bakery in East Lansing. She's also already spun off a separate entity, [Le Bon Macaron](#), which specializes in the French almond-based confections.

Kobus' forte is the ornate and original wedding cake, one of which was featured on a recent episode of the [Style Network's "Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?"](#)



"I never think of myself as baking cakes, because I don't feel that we are actually baking them—we are creating art," says Kobus, whose mother Wendy handles the oven and frosting duties. "Every cake is different and every cake has different inspiration and a reason behind it."

The cake decorator, who majored in French and minored in art at nearby [Albion College](#), adds a certain *je ne sais quoi* to her matrimonial centerpieces, some of which contain multiple layers and reach 30 inches in height.

No two cakes are alike, says Kobus, who draws each one by hand during hour-long consultations with prospective brides. She asks for color swatches or pictures of the bride and bridesmaid dresses, and what flowers will be carried down the aisle.

"If she is decorating with roses and lilies, you want to have those flowers on the cake," Kobus says. "You don't want to have daisies."

French Influence

Kobus' devotion to detail is part of the baggage she brought back from France, where she spent her collegiate junior year. She took culinary classes and interned at Paris-based interior design firm [FR66](#).

A fluent French speaker, Kobus found a requited love for culture, art and food. She concedes to having added an extra 10 to 15

pounds, which has long since evaporated from her slender frame.

The French simply appreciate food more, she says. Drive-thru, Egg Beaters and microwaveable are seen as gauche among the cuisine-conscious continentals.

In particular, Kobus remembers drawing quizzical looks when she and a friend asked for their order "to go" at a small restaurant specializing in quiche and tarts.

"We were walking around and eating and this old man took off his hat, looked at us and said, 'bon appetite,'" Kobus says. "We realized he was being polite and then we realized we shouldn't be walking around and eating. We thought, 'This is very American of us.'"

Getting Into Business

Kobus graduated college intending to teach high school French. But she learned A Piece O' Cake – a home-based business that evolved into a commercial enterprise at 4966 Northwind Drive – was for sale in 2007. She swapped a life of verb conjugation for a slice of business ownership.

Her parents, John and Wendy Kobus, became partners in the venture. John, who has a hand making the Le Bon Macaron delicacy, is proprietor of the [Colonial Bar](#) in South Lansing.

Due to her parents' background, operating a business wasn't daunting. "It's something I've grown up," Kobus says.

Hectic days at the peak of wedding and graduation season stretch from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., "which are our rough, crabby days," she says. She prepares cakes for three to five weddings a weekend and handles numerous non-nuptial occasions like birthdays, anniversaries and grand openings.

Satisfied Customers

A Piece O' Cake produced a commemorative art deco confectionery for the 2008 grand-opening of [the Christman building](#) in Downtown Lansing, the nation's first double-platinum green structure, and the cake for the [Country Club of Lansing](#)'s 100th anniversary celebration, in the same year.

Lansing's Cheryl Fritze is a repeat customer. Recently, A Piece O' Cake did a retro, 1950s dessert for her parents' 60th anniversary. However the three-tiered cake collapsed in her car the day before the celebration.



Cheryl Fritze quickly dialed Kobus on her cell.

"She said, 'Just come back and I'll remake it,'" says Cheryl, whose anniversary confection *part deux* was delivered in time for the party.

"We not only keep going back for the art — and it is a piece of art — but the cake tastes incredible, too," Fritze says.

Young and Talented

The fact that Kobus is already a successful businesswoman — at an age when most people are still stumbling to find their first job — is not lost on those who know her.

"She's 15 years my junior, and I am just amazed by everything she can do," says Traci Riehl, who first tapped the North Cambridge Street neighbor as her babysitter, but soon had Kobus working with her at the [Michigan Foundation for Educational Leadership](#).

Kobus handled bookkeeping and helped with foundation's day-to-day operations, Riehl says.

"As far as running her own business, she is very organized," says Riehl, who now owns Okemos-based [Collaborative Resource Group](#). "She and I bounced a lot of ideas off of each other on everything from how to handle employees, to advertising, to how we were doing things on the web."

"It's not an accident that she is successful," agrees Fritze, who joined Kobus' family and friends for the "Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?" showing that featured both Kobus' wedding cake and the event-planning acumen of Haslett-based [Petal & Forrest](#).

"She has the backing of her family, but she has the schooling and the training to do what she is doing. She is exceptional."

Taste for Success

Kobus has a hard time picking her favorite all-time cake because of the unique inspiration behind each one.



One birthday cake was drawn from a barn near the Lake Michigan shore. The friend commissioning the delicacy brought in photos of the rustic setting, which Kobus used as a template. The finished product included the barn as well as other poignant details like hollyhocks, a water pump and a dog in the driveway.

She made a wedding cake for her close friend Emily Turner, whom she met in Paris. The unadorned cake was baked in East Lansing and then put on a Florida-bound plane along with Kobus' tools. She decorated the centerpiece in the bride-to-be's parents' kitchen in Jacksonville, Fla..



On the wedding cake featured on the Style Network show, Kobus made a white fondant cake with gold branches crawling up the sides with real orchids tucked into the branches. A finishing touch included little sugar-paste, glitter ornaments that dangled from the branches.

The cake was shared by two Haslett couples who decided to get married at the same time.

Unlike her favorite artists — impressionist Claude Monet and sculptor Auguste Rodin — Kobus' best works are not preserved in a museum, but instead wind up in someone's stomach.

"I'm OK with it. It doesn't bother me at all," she says. "As long as there are great pictures, I don't care. I want them to eat to it."

Sometimes, she adds, "I think they have a harder time cutting

it than I do."

Larry O'Connor is a mid-Michigan freelance writer who is always up for a slice cake.

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Photos:

Kelly Kobus at Piece O' Cake

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