



## LAUSD says let them eat cake

### District doesn't dare scrap beloved cafeteria sweet treat

By Naush Boghossian, Staff Writer

Article Created: 02/03/2008 09:29:20 PM PST

Mystery meat. Rubber chicken. Soggy tater tots.

Public school districts generally aren't known for serving dynamite food, but Los Angeles Unified is generating buzz in its kitchens after a blogger last month noted a tasty treat the district has done right for decades: The Old Fashioned Coffee Cake.

Thousands of students recall the warm, cinnamon cake LAUSD introduced on campuses 54 years ago, and they are scouring the Internet to get their hands on the recipe.

And the treat is still among the most popular at the district's approximately 650 campuses - with about 850,000 pieces served each year.

"I am 58 years old, and I can still remember the smell of it," said Charles Jones, who graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1967. "Certain things just stay with you. It was fabulous. I ate it practically every day and sometimes more than once a day, I'm ashamed to say.

"When you come out of high school, you have to

have some good experience. It may be something for the kids to look forward to each day - getting a coffee cake in the morning with hot chocolate."

### Old Fashioned Coffee Cake Recipe from 1954

#### Cake:

3  $\frac{3}{4}$  Cups All Purpose flour  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  Cup Plus 2 Tbsp. Non-Fat Dry Milk  
 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  Tsp. Salt  
 1 Tsp. Nutmeg  
 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  Tsp. Cinnamon  
 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  Tsp. Baking Powder  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  Tsp. Baking Soda  
 2 Tbsp. Vinegar  
 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  Cups Water  
 1 Cup Plus 2 Tbsp. Oil  
 1 Cup Granulated Sugar  
 2 Eggs

#### Topping:

$\frac{1}{2}$  Cup Plus 3 Tbsp. All Purpose Flour  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  Cup Plus 1 Tsp. Brown Sugar, Packed  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  Cup Granulated Sugar  
 Dash of Salt  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  Plus 1/8 Tsp. Cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  Plus 1/8 Tsp. Nutmeg  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  Cup Salad Oil

Makes 28 Servings  
 Oven Temperature: 375°F  
 Baking Time: 35-55 Minutes



In a sea of school meals over the years that former students say generally ranged from the



uninspiring to the awful, the coffee cake is considered the one thing that was beyond good - it was exceptional.

When "Suebee" last month posted the recipe for the LAUSD coffee cake on chowhound.com, it was clear from the responses that she wasn't alone in her fond memories.

"I love you Suebee! I haven't thought about the coffee cake in ... 30 years! I loved the coffee cake at school. ... I can't wait to make some," one respondent wrote.

Some former students said they had getting a piece of coffee cake down to a science: Get to school early to make sure they don't sell out - or work at the cafeteria to score extra pieces.

Darryl Ryan, 26, remembers when the school would pass out the menu for the week at 102nd Street Elementary School. On the two days the school served coffee cake, he would make sure his mother dropped him at school early so he would be the first in line.

He also honed his negotiating skills on coffee cake day, offering to do other students' math homework in exchange for their cake.

"I learned the system, and the system tasted good," said Ryan, a press deputy for Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

"There are some things you don't forget from that time in elementary school - you may forget fractions, you may forget long division, but

you don't forget the red rubber ball, you don't forget tetherball, and you definitely don't forget the coffee cake."

Frank DiPaola was hanging out with friends having Costco coffee cake a couple of weeks ago when the conversation turned to memories of LAUSD coffee cake.

"It was probably the only good thing about high school, honestly," said DiPaola, 24, a set light technician from Van Nuys.

"The cake was nice; the crumb topping was nice. It's something you'd expect to get in a nice bakery, not something in a public school."

Widely considered a national leader in offering healthy food on campuses, LAUSD is trying to strike a balance between nutritious meals and foods that will attract kids to the cafeteria.

While years ago students could purchase dessert a la carte - including cookies, peanut butter bread and cinnamon rolls - those options have mostly been eliminated, said Dennis Barrett, director of food services at LAUSD.

But the district couldn't touch the coffee cake.

"If we took it off the menu, we'd be hung," Barrett said. "This one stayed by popular demand. They said, 'Please don't take it away.'"

But the recipe has undergone some adjustments

The logo for dailybulletin.com is displayed in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

to meet the higher nutritional standards the district adopted in recent years.

While the latest recipe isn't necessarily "coffee cake lite," all-purpose flour has been replaced with whole-wheat flour, and the calories have been reduced from 359 to 297 per serving. Fat grams have been cut from 44 to 40.

And today, rather than have cafeteria workers measure out the flour and sugar as they once did, the district gets a company to package pre-measured dry mixes, leaving school workers to simply add oil, eggs, vinegar and water.

At Bravo Medical Magnet, the coffee cake remains one of the most popular menu items, cafeteria manager Maria Rivadeneyra said.

The school serves it twice a week, and it sells out of the 1,200 weekly servings.

Senior Michelle Meza first experienced it as a freshman, and she has been a devotee for four years.

"Everything else is like cereal or like something disgusting," said Meza, 17, of Los Angeles. "It's like something you would expect to get at Starbucks. I'm serious."

It's not just the students who clamor for the dessert. The cafeteria workers also indulge themselves once a week.

"Every Friday, they make one for them," Rivadeneyra said. "Every Friday, it's like a

treat for the ladies."

Tony Cox's goal 45 years ago was to get in line early at James Foshay Junior High to get the biggest chunk before it sold out.

The warm cake with milk was one of the few things he remembers from his middle and high school days.

"That stuff was so freakin' good," said Cox, 58, a professor at California State University, Los Angeles. "I imagine there's some of that feeling of nostalgia that makes it seem better than what it was - but it really was good."

Most likely, the hunt for the original recipe might be an effort to recapture "the good old days," when something as simple as coffee cake could bring a smile, California State University, Northridge, psychology professor Marc Hamer said.

"In general, foods remind us of home, of Mother. They fill us up and soothe us," he said. "So we form a certain attachment to foods based on our pleasurable experience of the food itself and our association with ... the circumstances under which we consumed the foods."

"All of these connect in terms of our overall memory and pleasurable experience."

And what does the head of food services think of the coffee cake that has students from decades ago still talking about it?



"I'm just not into desserts," Barrett said. "I have to watch my weight."