

Wine: Perfect picks for the Labor Day bash

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Entertaining: Where there's smoke, there need not be fire

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Food

RECIPES

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- Violet LaBrecque's Chocolate Raspberry Cake E6
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STARS OF THE STATE FAIR

Single Guys, 8-Year-Olds, Grandmothers—They're All Dreaming of a Blue Ribbon

By Candy Sagon
Washington Post Staff Writer

Violet LaBrecque stands at the kitchen table and carefully touches the edge of a silver cake knife to the inch-thick layer of chocolate frosting on top of her homemade chocolate raspberry cake.

Slowly, so she doesn't disturb the petals of the chocolate rose she made for decoration, she pushes the shiny server down through the dark creaminess. Her two young daughters, their blue eyes intent and serious, watch silently. So do two visitors.

Just minutes before, the kitchen had been full of noise—laughter from the girls, talking among the adults, even meows from the plump family cat begging for attention. Now there is only the hiss of the coffee maker as LaBrecque skillfully begins to cut.

Everyone watches, the cat too. It's as if a solemn ritual were being performed: the Cutting of the Cake. And no ordinary cake. It's that *fruity*—a homemade cake, entirely from scratch. Even better, it's a cake made from the recipe that two years ago beat the pants off some 300 other competitors at the State Fair of Virginia and won LaBrecque a coveted blue ribbon.

LaBrecque's hand gently pushes the knife downward through another shelf of frosting, another layer of cake and then, clink, it hits the plate. LaBrecque draws it out, makes another cut, then slides out the first thick wedge of mahogany-colored cake.

She carefully places it on an old-fashioned flowered china plate and graciously hands it to one of her guests. The guest takes a bite.

Sigh.

It's delicious. Of course. Chocolate, with a hint of berries that keeps it from being too sweet, a soft, springy texture to the cake and a creamy, but not cloying, frosting.

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Violet LaBrecque, above center, with her prize-winning Chocolate Raspberry Cake and daughters, Amanda, left, and Elizabeth. They all compete—and win—in state and regional baking competitions.

Jerry Podlesak, far left, holds the freshly baked focaccia he made for the Arlington County Fair.

Rosalie Thatcher's prize-winning canned peaches.
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