

## Area woman to appear on Food Network cookie show

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Posted December 08, 2019

North Canton resident Cheryl Henderson has had her dream of being on Food Network granted twice.

The creative director at **Innis Maggiore** Advertising Agency by day and cookie baker by night was on “Christmas Cookie Challenge” in December 2019 and will be appearing on the brand-new Halloween version, “Halloween Cookie Challenge” at 10 p.m. Oct. 24 on Food Network/Discovery+.

I caught up with Henderson to talk about her business, Little Tooth Unique Sweets, how she got into baking, what it was like being called to do another show, and where she finds inspiration.

### **Q. How did you get into baking?**

**A.** “My two sisters and I taught ourselves to bake when we were teenagers, and we always added a unique creativity to what we made. We just never made anything “ordinary.” I dabbled in baking cute foods throughout the years – I live and die by a theme – but really got serious about it in 2014 when cupcakes were all the rage.”

“That’s when Little Tooth Unique Sweets was born. I would spend hours on end making intricately sculpted tiny cupcake toppers, which then led me into fondant cakes and sugar sculptures on a larger scale. In 2016, as cookies started gaining popularity, I took a royal icing class with a friend, and I felt like I had finally found my passion!”

### **Q. Do you have any formal training in this field? Or is this just a hobby?**

**A.** “I don’t have any formal baking training. I’m self-taught in a lot of areas of my life. I was home-schooled from third through 12th grades, and my college degree is elementary education, not graphic design. I kind of just pick things up as I go and learn along the way. There’s a lot of winging it going on.”

“My skills have developed over countless hours of practice through all hours of the night. Baking has always been a hobby for me, so it starts when I get home from my job as a creative director at an advertising agency.”

“Decorating sugar cookies is a labor of love that takes an unimaginable number of hours once the artistry begins ... and that’s after all the time it takes planning out the sets, making dough, baking, coloring icing – and lots of cleanup.”

“Cookiers often joke about being on ‘Team No Sleep,’ and that couldn’t be more true when you work full time and bake on the side. I used to take on paid orders and even taught some classes, but now I only make cookies occasionally for fun ... or if I really love you!”

### **Q. Your cookies are very intricate. Where do you find inspiration?**

**A.** “My style is very whimsical, colorful and full of personality. I love drawing inspiration from illustrations and characters that I enjoy – and any time I can work cats into a set is a bonus!”

“Often, I’ll just randomly come across something interesting in the world and think, ‘I could cookie that!’ I don’t like to replicate current trends, but would rather play in my own wild corner of my imagination. I’m also a creative writer, so layering in an element of storytelling in my bakes makes me really happy.”

**Q. With your day job being in a creative field, does baking such creative cookies feel like work? Or is it more therapeutic?**

**A.** “In my day job, I get to use my creative ability to execute a client’s vision in the most effective way. But in my cookie life, I get to do whatever I want!”

“I love being creative in both settings, but it’s so much fun to amuse myself in edible art and hopefully, that joy spills over to whomever is on the receiving end of my cookies. I love when people just trust me to execute a theme in my unique style – or when I can surprise someone with a set that perfectly encapsulates something they love.”

“Cookies are such a fun way to make people feel special, and if I can get someone to cry happy tears when they see what I’ve created, that’s the cherry on top!”

**Q. What did you think when Food Network/Discovery+ reached out to have you back on another show?**

**A.** “I was flabbergasted when I got the email! The message from the co-executive producer said they were casting a new show, and they were inviting back their favorite cookie makers from previous seasons of Christmas Cookie Challenge.” (She was on in 2019.)

“I was a favorite? Wowza! The new show contains six episodes with four bakers each, so to be chosen as one of 24 from all the talented people who’ve been on the show was just unbelievable. I couldn’t reply back YES fast enough!”

**Q. What was it like being on the show last time vs. this time?**

**A.** “It was super helpful having the experience of the first show heading into this one. I was able to tweak some of my strategy based on things that had gone wrong in the first go; for instance, using butter from the fridge instead of the sticks that had been sitting out in the hot lights.”

“I thought I’d be more relaxed this time, but it was actually more stressful! Maybe I was putting more pressure on myself to win and gain redemption. Maybe it was because I’ve been on cookie sabbatical for a while after two back surgeries. But I was ready to take on the challenge.”

“You could never imagine what the pressure is like on these shows until you’ve gone through it. It’s almost like an out-of-body experience! Time goes way too fast, you have no idea what’s happening, you do dumb things you’d never do in real life, and then you don’t remember anything that happened after it’s over. That kitchen is a timed vortex of panic, so please extend grace to the bakers you watch on your favorite Food Network shows!”

“I was lucky enough to compete against three of the nicest people, including one of the bakers from my first show who is now a dear friend. Jet Tila and Rosanna Pansino were incredible hosts and judges, and they were so supportive and encouraging – especially when I was feeling a little harried in the middle of it all. It was an incredible experience, and I’m so honored to have my dream of appearing on Food Network come true not once, but TWICE!”