

# Louisville's Sweet Secret

By Sharon M. Reynolds  
Of The Herald Staff

If it's spring, can the Derby pies be far behind?

Alas, they burst forth like bulbs that have been baking all winter in the dry earth — bearing names like Triple Crown Pie, Winner's Circle Pie, Thoroughbred Pie, Finish Line Pie.

But in this garden of goodies, there is only one Original Derby Pie®.

Derby Pie® is a super-secret concoction developed by George Kern, with the help of his parents, Walter and Leaudra, back in the 1950s, when the Kerns ran the Melrose Inn in Prospect, Ky.

George Kern did some experimenting with real chocolate, California walnuts, and a little of this and that in the kitchen and came up with a pie that's richer than most of the Derby-goers sitting in the Skye Terrace.

When the Kerns left the Melrose Inn in the 1960s, they continued to make the pies for restaurants and specialty stores. The pie became so successful that they decided to have the name registered and trademarked in 1968.

But since the name "Derby" is attached to almost anything that will sell in Derby City, other piemakers helped themselves, often unwittingly, to the name. When the friends of the Kerns spied these pastries, they relayed the information to the originators of the name.

A polite phone call and a letter from the Kern's lawyer, informing the offender that he or she was infringing upon the Kerns' rights, would usually follow.

"Most people would quit selling their pie or pick up ours," said Alan Rupp, the grandson of Walter and Leaudra Kern and now manager of the family business, called Kern's Kitchen. "A lot of them were just

It's called Derby Pie,  
and only five people  
in the world  
know what's in it.

ignorant of the fact that it is a registered name."

The family has had to go to court only twice. The first time, in 1977, the case was settled out of court. The most recent case is still pending. It concerns a woman who allegedly included a recipe for Derby Pie in her cookbook.

"It couldn't have been more flagrant," said Rupp. "They're just using our name. It's like putting a recipe for Coca-Cola in a cookbook."

Rupp has nothing but derision for the name-droppers. Many don't even aspire to be clones, he said.

"Some of them I've seen are so far off the wall. They're really garbage."

One of the most commonly misused ingredients is liquor. The Original Derby Pie® contains *no* liquor, Rupp said.

What else does it *not* contain?

"We don't use any fillers, preservatives or chemicals."

And that's about as far as the close-mouthed baker would go in divulging a carefully guarded family trade secret.

The recipe is known to only four living people (maybe five, if you count a brother who used to work in the business) — Rupp's mother, his grandmother, his wife, Shelia and himself.

"It's kind of a joke," Rupp said. "Everybody always asks for the recipe. But we don't have any spies around."

Operating the business out of



Lexington Herald/John C. Wyatt

The secret recipe for Derby Pie is protected by a trademark.

one room in his home helps keep the ingredients under lock and key. Rupp and his wife do all the work. If company is hanging around the kitchen, they usually leave discreetly when they hear the mixer starting up.

"I have been tempted to franchise the recipe," he admitted. "But I'm really not interested right now. I still like the personal touch, knowing

the customers and seeing the pies go out."

The pie season really starts cooking in mid-March. From then through Derby weekend, the Rups will bake around 900 pies a week, delivering every Friday. But except for a slow month here and there, Derby Pie® is a stock item in many Louisville restaurants year-round.

Unfortunately, none is sold in

Lexington. The nearest oasis is the Kastle Inn in Mt. Vernon.

But you can bring home a whole bunch and freeze them for up to six months, Rupp said.

"We stress that you serve them warm, when the chocolate is just starting to melt."

Add a cool dollop of whipped cream to the slightly chewy upper crust, bite into the creamy chocolate

pieces and try to take your mind off the calories by figuring out what the mystery ingredients are.

After working in the business for nearly a decade, you'd think Rupp would have sworn off the concoction himself. Not so, he said.

"I had a piece just the other day. We went to a restaurant for my birthday, and they brought me a slice with a little candle in it."