

Baker turns potatoes into pretty sweet pies

By Jolene Thym
STAFF WRITER

WHEN Patrick Caldwell of Pleasanton called to ask me if he could drop off one of his white sweet potato pies, I had to ask him to repeat himself. He did, but I was still mystified.

White potatoes, I get. Sweet potatoes, of course. But white sweet potato pie?

It wasn't until Caldwell knocked on my front door, pie in hand, that I understood that his was a pie made from a variety of sweet potato that happens to be both white and sweet. The pie, Caldwell explained, is one he's been making for years.

What does it taste like? It's creamy and sweet, without that earthiness you get from yams. Me. I'd like it with a side of fruit or a sprinkle of cinnamon, but Caldwell says most people who fall for his pie like it plain, like they had it while they were growing up in North Carolina — the pie's hometown, as it were.

"The white sweet potato was first grown in New Jersey, then it moved down to North Carolina. People there know this pie," he says, "but my recipe for white sweet potato pie is a really a family recipe."

Although his mom made the pie when he was a kid, Caldwell tweaked it for several years before he hit on the idea of



THE PIE MAN: Patrick Caldwell sells his White Sweet Potato Pie, based on an old family recipe, at farmers markets in the Bay Area.

turning his pie-making skills into a business.

"I was working in loss prevention out in Stockton and I started making these pies for people. They loved them. Then I remember we were going to my fiancée's for Thanksgiving, and she told her mom I'd bring my pie," he says. "I brought six pies

and none of her family would touch them.

"But the next day, her dad called to tell her that it was good pie."

Encouraged, Caldwell continued to bring the pies to potlucks and parties, where he was inevitably bombarded with requests for more pie.

He started making them for people and selling them for \$8 apiece.

Less than a year ago, Caldwell decided it was time to quit his job and go into pie-making full-time. He secured a business license and a kitchen in Mountain View, then started spending nights baking and smashing

Where to find them

► Patrick Caldwell's White Sweet Potato Pies are available at the following farmers markets:

► **Hayward:** 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday on Main Street between A and B streets

► **Fremont:** 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday at Bay Street and Fremont Boulevard

► **Concord:** 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday at Todos Santos Plaza, Willow Pass Road at Grant Street

► **Danville:** 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at Railroad Avenue at Prospect Street

enough giant, white-fleshed sweet potatoes to make 200 pies per week, most of which were sold at farmers markets.

Selling pies was bringing in a little bit of money, but in July, Caldwell signed with a packer who can take over the actual baking of the pies, if he can find a large retail account. In the meantime, Caldwell says you can find his pies — \$10 apiece — at several farmers markets.

If you need more help tracking down Patrick and his pies, give him a call at 925-922-3902.

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