

Naperville Eats: Cannoli recipe leads to career change

By Judy Buchenot For The Sun November 28, 2012 3:22PM

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Lou O'Brien uses her new cannoli filling to fill tart shells for a quick dessert. | Judy Buchenot-For The Sun

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Until her retirement, Lou O'Brien owned and managed LaFinesse, a chain of seven salons and day spas in the Naperville area. In 2005 she slowly eased out of the beauty business and found time to explore other interests.

The Naperville resident learned to play bridge, spent time golfing with friends, and cooked fabulous meals for family and friends. One of her most requested specialties were desserts made with cannoli filling.

"I started with my mother's recipe but then I tweaked it," O'Brien says.

Her mother, Christina Toste, was an accomplished baker and cook. She and her husband owned and operated the Finesse Bakery in Boston for many years and then came to Chicago where they opened an Italian restaurant called Christina's. Her father was also an accomplished pastry chef who taught cake decorating. O'Brien and her two sisters were frequent helpers in the ventures.

After retirement, O'Brien decided to expand her culinary horizons through a trip to Puglia, Italy, where she took classes at the Masseria Marzalossa Cooking School. Seven of her friends joined her on the trip, making it a very enjoyable excursion.

"Masseria Marzalossa is a renovated farm that has been turned into a cooking school and resort," O'Brien says. "It was a marvelous experience."