



LOCAL FOOD NEWS

By Eva Moore

All About Cupcake

In August, a shop called **Cupcake** opened its doors on **Lincoln Street in the Vista**, bringing specialty cupcakes to Columbia.

The business began in Charleston in 2006, when owner Kristin Kuhlke opened a shop on King Street, later expanding to Mount Pleasant and now here.

First, let's get this out of the way: Yes, the cupcake trend hit the rest of the country several years ago. ("Oh, you finally got cupcakes in Columbia?" one friend reports hearing from an out-of-towner.) Atlantans are smiling knowingly. Charlestonians, no doubt, are snickering at us behind their polite Southern hands. And New Yorkers are positively apoplectic, waving copies of *The New York Times*.

New York City has a hilarious compulsion to constantly assert its cupcake dominance.

"Bakers agree that the swelling trade in cupcakes is all about a combination of childhood and chic," *The New York Times* declared in 2003 of the city's burgeoning cupcake fad.

In 2007, the *Times* reported, feeling superior, that the "let's-wait-in-long-lines-for-a-cupcake trend" had made its way from New York to the West Coast.

By 2008, the *Times'* Jennifer 8 Lee (yes, that's a real name) was asking "Will cupcakes be the next Krispy Kreme?" In other words, would the cupcake trend expand too far too quickly, diluting the quality of the product and getting quickly played out? The same piece contained this choice bit of East Coast/West Coast chest thumping: "Los Angeles appears to be hopping on the cupcake bandwagon, but New York remains the genesis of cupcake awareness." Oh, Biggie, see what you spawned?

By last week, *The New York Times* was reporting on Sugar Daddy's, a cupcake shop in Amman, Jordan. Of course, New York City's cupcake supremacy plays a role: Fadi Jaber, Sugar Daddy's owner, lived in the city, and "when he tasted a vanilla-frosted vanilla cupcake from the Magnolia Bakery in Greenwich Village in 2004, it changed his life," reports the paper.

Fine, fine, New York: you brought back

the cupcake. You are the center of all things hip and twee and boutique. And when the cupcake fad is dead, you will be the first to declare it so.

None of that matters here. One taste of a Cupcake cupcake and you will be convinced that cupcakes were invented in the Vista.

The shop already appears wildly successful. Even non-dessert-eaters are all a-flutter over Cupcake. Adults throughout Columbia are giddy over pink sprinkles and cream cheese frosting.

Last Saturday afternoon around 1:30, the front door of Cupcake never stopped swinging. Groups of people came and went, everyone smiling. Children looked excited; their parents looked positively manic. (Need proof that Cupcake's target audience is adults? The shop is open until 10 p.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.)

The sweet interior, with its Dutch-cocoa brown, pale pink and vanilla color scheme and lots of natural light, is oddly uplifting. Everyone smiles as they enter.

Cupcake is unabashed about selling good moods: "Cupcakes are perfectly sized portions of personal happiness," declares the shop's web site.

And the cupcakes? They are good. Distressingly good. How-did-they-do-that good. Moist, not too big, with a swirl of icing and the merest scattering of sprinkles or chocolate chips for decoration, the cupcakes are simple and sweet.

They're simply made, too. The vanilla is from real vanilla beans. Butter and canola oil keep the cupcakes moist and flavorful.

Five standard flavors are available every day: chocolate, vanilla, vanilla with chocolate, black-and-white, and the store's best seller, red velvet. Four more flavors appear as daily specials. Friday, for example, features carrot, cookies & cream, key lime and turtle cupcakes. It's just enough variety to be fun but not overwhelming.

So take that, New York. Cupcake is open Monday through Wednesday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Thursday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Check freshcupcakes.com for daily flavors, FAQs and other information. **ff**

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