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Wisconsin Culinary Travel Examiner

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## European desserts are affordable little luxuries at Alpha Delights

May 3, 12:20 PM

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European treats, made the Old World way, at Alpha Delights in De Pere. (c) Mary Bergin Photo

"We have some very fussy people working here, at every level of production," Mary Pappas patiently explains, but I needed minimal convincing. Especially after diving into the little box of bakery that she made me take home.

The contents – bite-sized almond tea cakes, raspberry-flavored macaroons, a fan-shaped Palm Leaf dipped in dark chocolate – was nothing ordinary.

Add Greek specialties: walnut-rich baklava, powdered-sugar kourabiedes crescents, a strudel-like Corinthian Apple Pita, sesame-topped and lemon-kissed koulourakia cookies.

Then there was lunch, chicken salad scooped onto a golden croissant "made by hand, the original French way," as the baker describes it. In the mix were dried cherries and pine nuts, just enough to tease the tastebuds and enrich filling texture.

Alpha Delights European Bakery and Café, [De Pere](#), looks average only from the blue awning on the outside. "Our level of precision is a trademark for us," says Mary, co-owner with husband Rick Martens. Tempting the tastebuds has long been their livelihood; parents Steve and Mabel Pappas opened [Green Bay](#)'s Alpha restaurant and sweet shop in the 1930s.

I've been worried that the neighborhood bakery is becoming an endangered species, not because we've lost our sweet tooth, but because of the convenience of one-stop shopping at big groceries with bakery departments.

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Then I got reassurance from Dave Schmidt, executive director of the [Wisconsin Bakers Association](#). About 185 of the more than 400 state-licensed bakeries are members. [Click here](#) to read about the association's award winners.

Bakers that hold their own during tough economic times, Dave says, tend to be family operations that can realign products and practices to meet customer demand. He suggests this is harder for a specialist, like Krispy Kreme or a bagels-only shop.

"Offering lunch is an important component," Dave says, "and Alpha Delights is a perfect example of that. Bakeries have become gathering places, if not for lunch, for late-morning" coffee breaks.

We like the illusion of eating made-from-scratch treats, but Mary says "the word 'scratch' has really lost its meaning. Here, we really mean it."

Lemon curd, a signature filling, begins with squeezing one fresh lemon after another. It's not about popping open a jar or can. Perfecting a recipe, like the newly introduced raspberry macaroons, might require dozens of adjustments. Much is based upon Old World recipes.

"We follow European philosophies in cake making, going to the source of the flavor you want, instead of using sugar as a crutch," Mary says.

So buttercream frosting is not overly sweet. Wedding cakes are a mix of artistry and baking science. It's about how one bite feels and tastes in the mouth, as well as how one slice looks.

We first heard about Alpha Delights from Evelyn Whelan Rudolph of Appleton, who wrote: "I'd like to get married again, just to have one of their wedding cakes."

And after being a guest on Larry Meilior's Wisconsin Public Radio show, I heard from Mary Pappas, who suggested her business "is the kind of 'find' that you seem to appreciate."

Dozens of items can be tasted Dec. 3-5, during the annual Sampling Days. Or visit July 22-25, during De Pere's sidewalk sales, when family-recipe Greek sausage and citrus-flavored shrimp and chicken are grilled in the parking lot.

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Across the street is another culinary gem: Seroogys, 144 N. Wisconsin St. Chocolates have been made in-house since 1899, so expect sweet perfection. Meltaways are a specialty, by the candy bar or by the pound box of smaller pieces. Flavors? Mint, mocha and many others; the indecisive can order a sampler.

For more: [www.seroogys.com](http://www.seroogys.com), 800-776-0377.

**For more info:** Alpha Delights, 143 N. Wisconsin St., De Pere, Wis.: [www.alphadelights.com](http://www.alphadelights.com), 920-339-9144.

A taste of Europe at Alpha Delights in De Pere, Wisconsin

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