

Her initial customers gave her creations high marks, but the bakery business built slowly, her mother remembers. "There were days when she made \$10," Christine Cowles says. Still, Michaila was determined, and any profits went back into the endeavor. "Every time she made money, she would buy another spoon or cake pan."

Michaila got creative when it came to bringing in new equipment for the kitchen. When she found out a family friend had a

large restaurant-grade stove he no longer needed, she talked her way into acquiring it. Earlier this year, when it came time to expand the restaurant's offerings, she bartered for a dishwasher.

Today, Michaila holds a culinary degree from Johnson & Wales University, and is among the school's youngest graduates. She will return in the fall to study baking and pastry arts. While in school, she spends Monday through Thursday at the univer-




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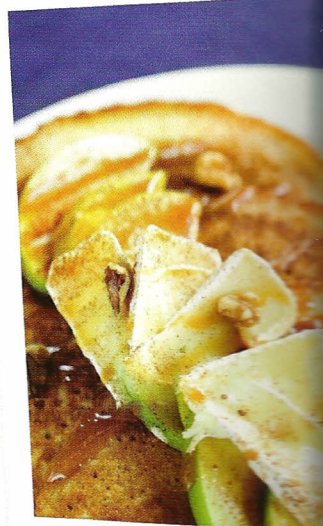

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SWEET TREATS Above, Huckleberry accepts cake and confection orders. Top, pancakes topped with apples, brie, and caramel sauce

sity's Charlotte campus, and the home to Lake Lure to put in 14-16 hours at the restaurant over the week. When she's baking, her day begins as early as 6 a.m. And many nights she's there when the last diner has finished dessert.

Looking back, her mother recognizes signs of a budding chef. "When I was outside, she was playing with rolling pins in the kitchen," Christine says.

The summers Michaila spent with her grandparents in Florida reinforced her love of cooking. "We cooked all the time," she says. "We'd do a lot of baking, but our main things, being Polish and Ukrainian, was making pierogies. At first, it was about playing with the dough, but as I got older, it was about spending time with my grandmother. I got to hear a bunch of stories."

The young chef's early culinary experiments became the subject of many tales themselves. One of the first