

# SPOTLIGHT



Michaila Cowles, 16, is the owner of Huckleberry's Bakery in Lake Lure. When she's not in the kitchen whipping up batches of cookies and bread, she's a student at Polk County High School, where she'll graduate early. In September, Cowles begins culinary school at Johnson & Wales University in Charlotte.

## Sweet 16

Lake Lure teen owns her own bakery and starts culinary school this fall

Text by Allison Flynn ❁ Photos by Garrett Byers

It's not unusual for bakery owners to start their day at 4 or 5 a.m., turning out muffins and loaves of bread before others have gotten up for the day.

But not many of them trade in their whisks for pens and pencils, spending their days as a high school student, too.

Michaila Cowles, owner of Huckleberry's Bakery in Lake Lure, is just 16 years old. She opened the bakery with the help of her mother, Christine Cosmus, on Jan. 14.

Cowles has dreamed of being a baker since childhood, saying her mom and grandmother were her inspiration.

"When I was younger we lived in Massachusetts and mom was in charge of meals at The Hartford," Cowles said. "I remember going in the kitchen and seeing all she did. She and my grandmother both really enjoy cooking."

Cowles mom also went to Johnson & Wales, she said.

The family moved to the area 18 months ago. They settled on Lake Lure by sheer chance.

"We decided to move in February 2009, and my sister and I took out a map and closed our eyes and pointed to a place," she said. "We were limited to North Carolina and we found a lake closest to

where our fingers landed."

Once here, Cowles entered school at Polk County High School. She has enough credits to graduate early and will finish requirements for her diploma in December.

"When I enrolled at Johnson & Wales, they saw I had already taken junior classes and asked if I wanted to come a year earlier," she said. "It's kind of a shock."

Acceptance to the school at 16 is unique, said Johnson & Wales Admissions Officer and Early Enrollment Program Coordinator Erika Ulanday.

"She's probably one of the youngest we've taken into the early enrollment program," Ulanday said.

In addition to her application, Cowles had to go through an interview process as well.

"There are a lot of different things we look for," Ulanday said. "They actually go through more than a regular student coming right out of high school. We have to make sure that they're ready."

Cowles will begin classes in the culinary arts food and beverage management program Sept. 8. She'll minor in baking. Ulanday said the program was one that wasn't easy to get into.

"We typically have about 20 students in the early program each year out of 65 to 75 applicants," she said. "This year's it's a little different because she is coming as a culinary student — our baking and pastry program is filled here. We are looking at around 8 to 10 pastry students."



Cowles' bakery is located next to Apple Valley Motor Coach Inn in an old house. She's been told the former owner liked to bake as well.

As if finishing high school and owning the bakery weren't enough to fill her plate, Cowles took over management of Dalton's General Store in June. Between the two locations, there's a variety of cooking and baking, she said.

"The only thing we haven't done is bagels and doughnuts, because there's just no space for the equipment it takes to do those," Cowles said.

Cookies are the most popular bakery item, Cowles said. Cookies are also sold at Daltons, Red Mountain and McGuinn's.

Being a bakery owner, especially at 16, is challenging. She and her mom tag team the business side of the bakery — price shopping, grocery purchasing and payroll — and she's younger than her employees. During the school week, she spends 10 to 15 hours a week at the bakery. On the weekends, she gets up at 5 or 5:30 to work, and is often in bed before the sun goes down.

"All my friends laugh at me when I say I went to bed at 7:30," she said. "Sometimes I think I'm missing out on that (being a teenager), but being here, I forget about all of that. It's like a second family."

The bakery is located in an old farmhouse next to the entrance to Apple Valley Motor Lodge. The bakery got its name from her

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