

91. AUNT CHICK'S COOKIE CUTTERS

She dispensed practical kitchen wisdom to several generations of cooks and solved the problem of weepy meringue. But the Tulsa World's Aunt Chick is remembered best for her cookie cutters.

There's the jolly Santa with the puffy cheeks and curly beard. And the stocking with its patch at the toe and toys coming out of the top. They're elaborate and big and beloved.

Every Christmas, people call the paper to say their mother or grandmother's Aunt Chick cookie cutters have finally worn out and they're desperate to replace them. And, luckily, we have a place to send them — to a Web site called www.tulsaworld.com/grammascutters.

After tracking down a warehouse full of the old cookie cutters, Carrie Greno not only bought them all, she bought the molds and the copyright, too. Business couldn't be better.

Not bad for a cookie cutter designed in the '40s, by a woman who started using a nom de plume because she didn't want her rich banker husband to know she was writing a newspaper column.

Aunt Chick — Nettie McBirney — was her generation's Martha Stewart. Not content with writing about cooking, she pioneered techniques we still use.

She made rolling-pin covers and wire-bottomed pie pans that eliminated soggy crust. And she got them sold nationally. A best-selling cookbook — "Aunt Chick's Pies" — followed and sold more than 650,000 copies. And the plastic cookie cutters were like nothing anyone had ever seen.

Not only were they incredibly detailed, but they had little bumps all along the inside that were supposed to help the dough slide out more easily.

They're still not easy to use, but the cookies are truly heirloom quality.

— Ashley Parrish



Robyn Lynn Photography / Courtesy

92. RICK BAYLESS

If it weren't for Oklahoma barbecue, Rick Bayless' career as a master of authentic Mexican cuisine might never have happened.

Bayless' parents ran the now-closed Hickory House barbecue restaurant in his native Oklahoma City. And it was there — learning the subtle differences that define what "barbecue" means in a given region — that Bayless developed his understanding that there was a world of flavors and foods to explore.

He made his first trip to Mexico as a teenager, and continues to return regularly — to discover new dishes and ingredients, to film episodes of his PBS series, "Mexico One Plate at a Time," and to reconnect with a culture that, for him, is endlessly inspiring.

Bayless now heads a food empire, anchored by his two Chicago restaurants — Frontera Grill and Topolobampo — a series of cookbooks and condiments and his TV appearances.

But Bayless' work in the world of food goes beyond mere commerce in comestibles, through his work with the Frontera Farmer Foundation, an organization that supports small local farmers, and Share Our Strength, the nation's largest hunger advocacy organization.



Courtesy

— James D. Watts Jr.

Bayless

93. SONIC — AMERICA'S DRIVE IN

Small towns in Oklahoma are more likely to have a Sonic than a McDonald's. And generations of kids know Sonic is the only place to turn around while cruising Main Street.

Started in 1953 in Shawnee, Sonic is an Oklahoma success story of the fast-food variety. Now based in Oklahoma City, the company boasts more than 3,000 drive-ins in the nation.

Scores of native Oklahomans who now live outside the "Sonic zone" come back home to quench their thirst for that signature drink — the cherry limeade.

Jim Luetkemeyer did his fair share of limeade sippin' growing up in Okeene and later in Stillwater. Now the communications director for U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas, Luetkemeyer said he's lucky enough to get to travel back to Oklahoma for work.

"When I return to Washington I brag to my Okie friends on how many times I went to Sonic," he said. "People in Oklahoma don't know how lucky they are to have readily accessible Sonic cherry limeades whenever the urge strikes them.

"There have been discussions on taking a road trip just for the taste of home," he said.

— Barbara Allen



Courtesy

By 1958, there were four Top Hat drive-ins in Oklahoma. The name would later be changed to Sonic.

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