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CUPCAKE WARRIORS

Local bakery battles it out on Food Network competition

By AMY NICHOL SMITH
The Monitor

MCALLEN — Sabrina Rodriguez-Louck had to do some serious arm-twisting to persuade her sister Erica Rodriguez to bake cupcakes on national television.

"I didn't nominate myself. My sister nominated me to go with her," Erica, 32, said. "It's been her dream since, I don't know. She loves the show."

The bakers who opened RGV Cupcake Factory only a year ago in McAllen will watch themselves compete in The Food Network's popular reality competition show "Cupcake Wars."

At first, it was just an idea, something the women would dream about.

"I'm such an avid watcher," Sabrina said. "We've said it before, like, 'Wouldn't it be so fun? I mean, what are the odds of us actually getting on the show?'"

So Sabrina finally stopped dreaming and convinced Erica to try it. Once the cupcake bakers found the application online, quickly filled it out and then submitted it, they received an email thanking them for their submission, but also informing them that casting for the next season was closed.

The sisters were a little disappointed.

"Of course," Sabrina said. "They have, like, hundreds of applicants. And I told (Erica), 'They're probably closed until, like, season-freakin'-10, dude.'"

They were ready to put "Cupcake Wars" out of their minds.

The very next day, Erica received a call from a Food Network employee asking the women to make a quick video.

"He said, 'We need it in 24 hours,'" Sabrina said.

Suddenly, their pipe dream became closer to reality, but it still seemed like a long shot to Erica.

"I think Sabrina, in her heart of hearts, thought that we are going to get



(Top Left) Johanna Saenz, Sabrina Rodriguez and Erica Rodriguez are shown at their cupcake shop in McAllen: RGV Cupcake Factory. They will compete on the Food Network's show "Cupcake Wars" tonight.



Erica Rodriguez, left, and Sabrina Rodriguez-Louck decorate cupcakes at their at their bakery in McAllen: RGV Cupcake Factory. They will compete on the Food Network's show "Cupcake Wars" tonight.

chosen," she said.

During a lunch break from their jobs as speech therapists, Erica and Sabrina drove to the shop to shoot the film using a camera phone. They didn't even change their scrubs.

Two takes had to be enough because they had

to get back to work.

They submitted the video and waited for a response.

Erica received the call the following day — the producers loved their video.

Several phone conversations and emails later, Erica and Sabrina had flights booked to Los Angeles.

After the bakers signed on the dotted line, they had to get organized, practice and take time off to participate in the show.

"I work a little bit faster, and I'm just on-the-go and (Sabrina) is more, like, attention-to-detail," Erica said.

So the plan was set: Erica would be head baker and Sabrina would act as her assistant, taking orders and tying up loose ends, although not everything in reality TV goes according to plan.

"We have busy lives," Erica said. "We do have five jobs. So to take off, like, a week from my five jobs was, like, practically impossible."

In addition to their full-

MORE INFO

When it's on
Cupcake Wars airs 7 p.m. tonight
Food Network
Time Warner Cable Channel 73, Dish Network Channel 110

Where it's at
RGV Cupcake Factory is located at 1414 N. 10th St., McAllen 956-618-9979

and said, "I'm not going."

Less than 24 hours before the flight, Johanna Saenz, the Rodriguez sisters' cool-headed friend and bakery business partner, had to help calm Erica and repack the suitcases.

"I just felt all the pressure on me, I really did," Erica said.

With the crisis averted, Erica and Sabrina flew to Los Angeles for the next leg of their journey.

Standing on the show's set, Erica and Sabrina sized up their competition.

Each team was intimidating in some way: One had a giant, organized toolbox with a variety of cupcake tools; another team was a couple of very confident cheerleaders, Erica said.

Their egos deflated slightly.

"And then Sabrina literally turns to me and says, 'Oh, Erica, at least your earrings are cute,'" Erica said.

There was no turning back now, though. Cameras were set to roll and began capturing the RGV Cupcake Factory bakers' every move, mistake and moment of panic.

At one point, Erica accidentally set a grease fire.

"I didn't know what I was doing," she said. "I don't really cook a whole lot — that's Sabrina's deal. ... I remember putting the dish in the sink and just turning on the water, not thinking I mean, the level of stress is just — I can't even describe it."

Whether the fire is disastrous or only a small obstacle is only known by the Rodriguez sisters — at least, until tonight's episode airs.

If the girls take home the title of "Cupcake Wars" champion, they will receive a check for \$10,000 and the prestige of being the only Texan winners, Erica said.

Regardless of how well they did or didn't do on the show, both Sabrina and Erica have come out of the challenging experience with even more confidence.

"We went in thinking, mentally, we can handle this," Erica said. "And we've learned what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, so we came back feeling like we can do anything now."

Study: Library e-books takes slow pace

By HILLET ITALIA
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — E-book readers have been relatively slow to borrow digital works from the library, frustrated by a limited selection and by not even knowing whether their local branch offers e-releases, according to a new study.

The Pew Research Center published a survey Friday that reports around 12 percent of e-book users 16 years and older downloaded a text from the library over the past year. Earlier in 2012, Pew issued a study showing that around 20 percent of adults had read an e-book recently.

Simon & Schuster, the Hachette Book Group and other major publishers have limited e-book offerings to libraries or refused to make any available, citing concerns that the ease of free downloads would hurt sales. Lack of awareness may be another factor. Around 60 percent of those 16 and older couldn't say whether their libraries had e-books.

Pew's Internet & American Life Project study, conducted with nearly 3,000 respondents between Nov. 16 and Dec. 11, 2011, suggests that library patrons trying to borrow digital texts have been deterred by the selection and by not having the right e-book device. Just over half of respondents said they did not have the book they were looking for and nearly 20 percent found that the device they owned could not receive a given title.

Nearly half of those who have not borrowed an e-book said they would be "very" or "somewhat" interested if they were lent an e-reading device with a book already downloaded.

Officials from the American Library Association have been meeting with publishers in an effort to work out a system that would satisfy both sides. On Thursday, Penguin Group (USA) announced a pilot program with the New York and Brooklyn library systems that will make e-books available six months after they first go on sale. Penguin had suspended its e-book program with libraries last year.

"I applaud Penguin's decision today to re-start e-book sales to libraries so that we may again meet our mutual goals of connecting authors and readers," library association president Molly Raphael said in a statement.

One statistic reported by Pew should please publishers and librarians: Those who borrow e-books from libraries tend to read more — 29 books a year — than readers who don't use the library (23 books). But library card holders also are more likely to borrow, as opposed to buy, a book compared to those without library cards.

Overall, around half of those surveyed said they had bought their most recent book. Around 15 percent said they had borrowed a copy from the library.

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