

A retreat from sweet - Savory king cakes are this year's Mardi Gras food trend

[View Article](#)

Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - February 4, 2015

- *Author/Byline: Judy Walker, Food editor*
- *Section: LIVING*
- *Page: C01*
- *Readability: 10-12 grade level (Lexile: 1160)*

Last year's harbingers of Mardi Gras flavor mayhem were a hamburger using king cake as a bun and a crawfish king cake. This Carnival season, savory king cakes seem to be dripping cheese all over the south Louisiana map.

Since the King Cake Festival on Jan. 25, the Kenner-based wholesale bakery Angelo Cartozzo's has debuted three new savory flavors: Baked ham and cheese with jalapeno; bacon cheeseburger; and smoked sausage with cheese.

And this week in Lafayette, a boudin-stuffed king cake topped with cane syrup and cracklins made the news. The next day, Cake Café in the Marigny started making it, too.

Cartozzo's also makes a muffuletta king cake, as does baker John Caluda. Caluda is no stranger to to savory king cakes: He says he's been making crawfish king cakes for the past 10 years or so.

Across the lake in Mandeville, Bosco's Italian Café introduced its La Louisiana Crawfish King Cake last year. It was included in our 58 Days of King Cake project.

And it had legs (figuratively speaking).

"We have been running out of them all year because the demand was incredible," said Eileen Bevis-Bennett of Bosco's.

"We were asked to represent St. Tammany Parish as their 'Taste of the Region' for two events." Bosco's now makes them in four sizes, and they're shipped nationally via cajungrocer.com.

The King Cake Burger, introduced last year by the Food Drunk food truck, has been a good seller in the Central Business District, the truck's owners say.

Creative king cakes made by chefs and restaurants are well documented. In 2014, Todd A. Price wrote about local chefs' twists on king cakes, from milkshakes to bread puddings and doughnuts. The only savory note was in the Elvis king cake at Cochon Butcher, which includes bananas and peanut butter, topped with marshmallow cream and candied bacon.

Maybe it's just more pushing of the envelope. And more uses for bacon, a decade-long trend that will not die.

"It's something different," said Angelo Cartozzo, who started baking with his grandfather at Angelo's Bakery when Cleary Avenue was a dirt road.

"The king cake was just plain old dough and sugar. We added cinnamon. Then in '81 or '82 we started with the fillings, cream cheese, Bavarian cream. Then the icing and the sugar. It just kind of evolved," Cartozzo said.

Caluda's muffuletta king cake was judged "Most Savory" at the recent King Cake Festival by a big panel of judges.

I was one of them. I didn't know who made the 31 bites of king cake all the judges tasted, but when I tasted the quality of ingredients in the muffuletta one, I gave it a high score.

Caluda and crew also make the beloved crawfish strudel sold at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. A decade ago, he started using the filling in king cakes during Carnival and trademarked the "Crawfish King Cake" name. They are baked on Fridays to sell on Fridays and Saturdays.

"The dough is different," Caluda said. "We experimented with all kinds of things: Purple onions, yellow bell pepper. We came up with romano cheese, colored purple, green and gold.

"We color it with food coloring in the food processor, just like we do with sugar."

When the crawfish king cake is served hot at a party or catering event, it is drizzled with sour cream. When picked up at the storefront in Elmwood, there is no sour cream on it.

The cost is \$35 for either the crawfish or muffuletta king cake, which make six entrée or 12 to 14 small servings. Both can be shipped for an extra charge.

At last year's festival, Cartozzo's won the savory honors for its crawfish king cake. It's braided, unlike the sesame-seed-topped muffuletta king cake. Both are \$25 when ordered before 2 p.m. and picked up the next day, or \$55, shipped. All of Cartozzo's king cakes, savory and sweet, are made to order.

Cartozzo said he scales back the sugar in the dough for savory king cakes. They have about 15 percent sugar, compared to about 25 percent for regular king cake dough.

"King cake dough is sweet, but it's not as sweet as you think it is," Cartozzo said. "It's the filling and icing that you taste."

Most of Cartozzo's business is delivery to hotels, restaurants and casinos. Restaurant Depot carries about 20 of its products, including breads, muffulettas and fig cookies. Cartozzo's also bakes king cakes for PJ's, the local coffee house chain. Cortozzo said he has talked to PJs about offering a savory cake next year.

Why the trend?

"The savory ones seem to be taking off because not a lot of people make them," Cartozzo said.

"Everything's evolving," Caluda said. "It's the Internet, social media and everything else."

.....

Food editor Judy Walker can be reached at jwalker@nola.com. Follow her on Twitter (@JudyWalkerCooks) and Facebook (JudyWalkerCooks)

- **Record:** MERLIN_21747280
- **Copyright:** Copyright, 2015, The Times-Picayune Publishing Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Used by NewsBank with Permission.