

Proudly Trans And Filipino, Owner Calls Jennivee's Bakery 'My No. 1 Dream'



By Ariel Cheung | December 15, 2016 5:59am

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LAKEVIEW — Raised as a boy in the Philippines, Jenne Vailoces always enjoyed the feminine side of life.

While it was fun to dress in her mother's clothes and use a towel to pretend she had long, luxurious hair, nothing connected with the young Vailoces like watching her mother bake.



Jenne Vailoces, 33, wants to open her own bakery at Sheffield a...
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The love of baking followed Vailoces to Chicago, where she is soon to open a Filipino-American bakery that will always welcome people like her within the LGBTQ community.

Jennivee's Bakery will open at 3301 N. Sheffield Ave. in the coming weeks as a late-night bakery and dessert cafe offering sumptuous cakes like a Ferrero Rocher mousse or ube buttercream.

"I want this to be the bakery that the LGBT people in Chicago can proudly call their own," Vailoces said. "My No. 1 passion is baking, and I'm a transgender woman who is also very passionate about trans and LGBT issues. So I wanted to share a part of (both) my passions."

Vailoces, now 33 and living in West Rogers Park, said news of bakeries refusing to serve wedding cakes to same-sex couples first inspired her idea to open a bakery designed to welcome those who would be shunned elsewhere.



Ube buttercream is among the cupcake and cake offerings Jenne Vailoces will offer at Jennivee's Bakery. Ube, a purple yam, is used frequently in Filipino cooking. [DNAinfo/Ariel Cheung]

While many of Chicago's bakeries are more than happy to serve the city's vibrant gay population, Vailoces said her Filipino background mixed with the old-school charm of American layer cakes will help Jennivee's Bakery stand out.

"A lot of Chicago bakeries go the European or French patisserie route," Vailoces said. "They do classic, little, pretty French pastries like macarons, which I think is adorable, but I want to do something different."

Jennivee's Bakery — named for what Vailoces' friends call her — will replace the [short-lived Real Kitchen expansion](#) that closed in spring 2015. With sidewalk seating for warm weather, the bakery will be a popular stop for crowds traveling from Wrigleyville and Boystown to the Belmont "L" station, she said.

Around 800 square feet, the bakery will seat about 12 people, plus more on the sidewalk patio. The storefront is being remade into an elegant, cozy space complete with two chandeliers and ornate, French-inspired furniture.



Jennivee's Bakery will open in the former Real Kitchen at 3301 N. Sheffield Ave. [DNAinfo/Ariel Cheung]

While Vailoces plans to serve Dark Matter coffee, tea and hot chocolate, she'd like to add a BYOB element for customers stopping by for something sweet to go with a bottle of champagne or dessert wine. She plans to be open from 4 p.m.-midnight on weekdays and until 2 a.m. on weekends.

While Vailoces has no formal training as a pastry chef or a business owner, she has been drumming up interest with [an online ordering service](#). She hoped to raise sufficient start-up cash in [an Indiegogo campaign](#) last year, but got just \$480 from eight backers.

What she does have are friends who have helped her along the way, even as she works full-time as a physical therapist in Bucktown, Vailoces said. Some friends offer business advice, while bakery owners she knows share tips. Others have helped her remodel the shop.

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On [Facebook](#), fans declare themselves "hooked for life" on her tasty treats. They rave about options like her tres leches cake, made with light vanilla chiffon layers and frosted with Mexican vanilla whipped cream.

Tropical fruits like mango or [ube](#) are heavily featured in Filipino desserts, as are Spanish elements like custards and flan. Jennivee's ube cakes are a loving tribute to her native country, and "that's my best seller, basically," Vailoces said. The Ferrero Rocher mousse cake, meanwhile, is a decadent, chocolatey cake topped with the crispy hazelnut candies.

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As Vailoces rushes to complete renovations, she said she plans to reach out to the Center on Halsted and other community groups to forge relationships, possibly offering internships to students interested in the culinary arts.

"I wanted to be a proudly trans-owned business, and I wanted to hopefully inspire other trans people," Vailoces said. "They shouldn't less of themselves because they're trans. You can still follow your dreams."

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