COOKING *with Kerry Dunnington*

Hey, Obama: This chocolate cake can't be 'beet'

No one —including our soon-to-be 44th president — would have guessed the secret ingredient on their own

By Kerry Dunnington
Special to The Examiner

President-elect Barack Obama doesn't like beets. A recent article by The Associated Press quoted him saying, "I always avoid eating them."

But Obama might change his mind after trying one of my unusual culinary accolades, in which I folded shredded garnet-colored, tender, sweet beets into chocolate cake batter. After my husband taste-tested the cake, I asked whether he could guess the predominant ingredient. Apple sauce? Buttermilk? Yogurt?

Thrilled with my clever endeavor, I couldn't wait to share it with my nephew Travis, who announced before arriving for a weeklong stay that he doesn't eat beets. After dinner I cut the three of us each a piece of cake. After the first bite, Travis commented how delicious and moist it was. A second piece was devoured, and then another, until Travis finished the cake. He couldn't guess the main ingredient either.

Whenever the opportunity arises to make dessert for family and friends, I prepare the chocolate beet cake. I've fooled hundreds of taste-testers, and no one has ever guessed the main ingredient.

Because I love to forage through the refrigerator and pantry (it rouses culinary creativity and allows me to invent combinations using ingredients I have on hand), I've created some improbable creations with tasty results. I've added parsnips (carrots' cousins) to cake batter. And the addition of zucchini and spaghetti squash creates moist cakes with the benefit of added fiber, flavor and nutrients.

No matter his aversion to beets, I'm certain Obama would think this chocolate cake really can't be beat!

Kerry Dunnington is a food columnist and author of "This Book Cooks." She can be reached at thisbookcooks@verizon.net.

Chocolate Beet Cake

1 cup white flour
2/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup low-fat sour cream
3 tablespoons canola oil
1 egg, lightly beaten
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1/4 cup reserved beet water
2 medium beets, cooked until tender, peeled and shredded (about 1 cup)

Icing
One 4-ounce package low-fat cream cheese, at room temperature
1/2 cup confectioner's sugar
1/4 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 350. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt.

In a medium bowl, whisk sour cream, oil, egg, vanilla and reserved beet water until well combined. Add sour cream mixture to flour mixture and stir until well combined. Fold in shredded beets. Spoon batter into a lightly oiled 8-inch round cake pan and bake for 22 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center of cake comes out clean.

Allow cake to cool before transferring to a platter. In a small bowl, whisk together cream cheese, confectioner's sugar and vanilla. Spread icing evenly over cake. Serves six.

Nutritional analysis: 342 calories, 13 grams total fat, 4 grams saturated fat, 0 grams trans fat, 14 mgs cholesterol, 141 mgs sodium, 56 grams total carbohydrate, 4 grams dietary fiber, 7 grams protein, 34 grams sugar

BEETS?
Who has to know? Let beets be your little secret ingredient.

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NEEDED: MORE REGISTERED NURSES

A job in high demand during recession

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – When Katie Wylie tells her grandchildren about her trials and tribulations during the Great Recession of '09, they might fall asleep.

After all, it's unlikely Wylie will go hungry, or even be forced to cut back. She'll have no tales of wandering from state to state, looking for a job, any job.

In fact, it's highly likely Wylie's salary will grow, along with her benefits and her position in life.

Why? Because Wylie is a registered nurse. And these days, nurses — like other health care professionals — are in such high demand that hospitals are competing for them by offering sign-on bonuses, scholarships and career-advancement incentives in return for work commitments.

The Fayetteville Observer reported that while people in other professions worry about losing their livelihoods because of economic cutbacks, the Department of Labor estimated that nearly 1 million additional nurses would be needed between 2006 and 2016.

With statistics like that, a good nurse shouldn't have any trouble finding a job with plenty of perks, said Phyllis Malone, recruitment manager at Cape Fear Valley Health System.

"This is a national problem," Malone said. "Nursing needs have changed. People live longer. People are sicker than they used to be. There is such a need."

Wylie, whose husband is stationed at Fort Bragg, recently left Duke University Medical Center for Cape Fear Valley to be closer to home.

It's been worth it, too, she said. Not only was she offered a $2,500 sign-on bonus and a $1,500 relocation allowance, the health system gave her the opportunity to do what she really wanted to do — work in the cardiovascular intensive care unit. In addition to the six to eight weeks of training Wylie will receive on her unit, she'll also be paid to attend a 12-week critical care school on the hospital's campus in preparation for her new position.

The training and educational incentives have become a standard in the health care industry as skilled professionals become harder to find, Malone said.

"We have to grow our own," she said.

"Grow our own" is a phrase repeated often by recruiters, who can only do so much to attract nurses to their cities and facilities. – *AP*

WANTED
These days, nurses are in such high demand that hospitals are competing for them by offering sign-on bonuses, scholarships and career-advancement incentives in return for work commitments. Isn't it nice to be needed?

OUTBREAK

Some Little Debbie products joining peanut butter recall

The company that sells Little Debbie snacks announced a recall Sunday of peanut butter crackers because of a potential link to a deadly salmonella outbreak.

The voluntary recall came one day after the government advised consumers to avoid eating cookies, cakes, ice cream and other foods with peanut butter until health officials learn more about the contamination.

The announcement by McKee Foods Corp. of Collegedale, Tenn., about two kinds of Little Debbie products was the latest in a string of voluntary recalls following the most recent guidance by health officials.

McKee said it had not received any complaints about illnesses from people who ate any size peanut butter toasty sandwich crackers or peanut butter cheese sandwich crackers. The recall covers crackers produced on or after July 1.

Officials are focusing on peanut paste, as well as peanut butter, produced at a Blakely, Ga., facility owned by Peanut Corp. of America. Its peanut butter is not sold directly to consumers but distributed to institutions and food companies. But the peanut paste, made from roasted peanuts, is an ingredient in cookies, cakes and other products that people buy in the supermarket.

So far, more than 470 people have gotten sick in 43 states, and at least 90 had to be hospitalized. At least six deaths are being blamed on the outbreak. Salmonella is a bacteria and the most common source of food poisoning in the U.S., causing diarrhea, cramping and fever.

Also Sunday, the maker of Peter Pan peanut butter said none of its products is associated with the outbreak. Peter Pan and other peanut butter produced by ConAgra Foods Inc. were linked in 2007 to a salmonella outbreak that sickened more than 625 people in 47 states.

The company recalled all its peanut butter and eventually traced the contamination to a leaky roof and faulty sprinkler head at its Georgia plant. In a statement, ConAgra said it does not buy any ingredients from Peanut Corp.

The Kellogg Co., which listed Peanut Corp. as one of its suppliers, has recalled 16 products. McKee said Kellogg manufactured the Little Debbie crackers covered by the recall.

The Kellogg products recalled include Austin and Keebler branded peanut butter sandwich crackers, and some snack-size packs of Famous Amos peanut butter cookies and Keebler Soft Batch Homestyle peanut butter cookies.

Most peanut butter sold in jars at supermarkets appears to be safe, the Food and Drug Administration said Saturday. – *AP*

Surf the Web
FDA: tinyurl.com/8srctw