



PHOTO: MICHAEL W. BUNCH

at the Nashville Farmers' Market

Geraldine Bell

The Baker

A lot of folks fritter away their lives dreaming about pie-in-the-sky fantasies.

Not Geraldine Bell. She dreamed about pie in the oven — and made her dream a reality.

Bell, who's also a certified nurse technician, has been baking pies for about 18 years. After perfecting her grandmother's chess pie recipe, she trained at Tennessee State University's Small Business Development Center, and in 2003 began selling pies wherever she could: at nursing homes where she worked, at flea markets, at beauty salons. For the past seven years, she's been selling them at the Nashville Farmers' Market, and you can find her there every Friday, greeting passers-by with a welcoming smile as warm as the oven she bakes her pies in. She also sets up shop at the Franklin Farmers Market every Saturday.

Chess pies are her specialty, and not just the classic version. "When I say chess, I'm talking about chess, chocolate chess, lemon chess, coconut chess, pecan chess, pineapple chess," she says. Bell, who grew up just down the road in Columbia, also makes traditional sweet potato pies, pumpkin, chocolate fudge, pecan — you name it. She even makes gluten-free pies, and pies aimed at diabetics. Small pies go for \$2 (\$4 for gluten-free), and large pies sell for between \$12 and \$16.

All of the custardy magic transpires in the kitchen of Bell's Inglewood home, where she also makes pies to order. When she spoke to the *Scene*, she was getting ready to make 150 tarts for a special event. She says she also gets a lot of wedding business in the summertime.

Bell still works one or two days a week at nursing jobs, but she says the pie business is what she really wants to focus on. As for the secret to her success, she says it's simple: "I would like people to know that I'm a true believer in my lord and savior Jesus Christ. I wouldn't have gotten this started without my heavenly father."

Though she's made her name as a baker, Bell says she's also a pretty good cook. "My favorite things to cook are fried chicken, turnip greens, macaroni and cheese. I love chitlins and dressing too."

Bell has been married to her husband, Billy, for 26 years. They have a son, Joshua, 24. She says her husband is one of the biggest fans of her pies.

But surely, after all of those years making pies, they must get tired of them, right? "No, I don't," she says emphatically. "My husband neither. We love 'em."