

A Baker is a baker (and her son's a burger maker)

Family ties are the key to the system at Baker Burger Company

BY SCOTT CRONICK

Yes, there is someone with the last name Baker that co-owns Baker Burger Company in Margate, but that Baker is really a baker.

In fact, Kelly Baker used her get-a-name-change-for-free-with-divorce pass to not return to her maiden name but to take on a last name that she identifies with. And that identity is what makes Baker Burger Company so different.

Baker and her son Ethan Roberts opened Baker Burger Company this spring in the spot of two former burger places, and their burgers are fabulous, better than both previous incarnations in that spot. But what really sets Baker Burger Company apart is Baker's baked goodies, everything from her legendary vanilla cupcakes with the best vanilla buttercream icing you may ever have to her homemade cookies — everything from Snickerdoodle to chocolate chip to The Big O, where two classic chocolate chip cookies are baked with an Oreo inside — to her now-famous pies, which have taken over the downbeach this summer so much that she can't keep them in stock.

But more on those later. Let's talk about the main attraction: the burgers. Roberts, a first-year student at the Academy of Culinary Arts at Atlantic Cape Community College in Mays Landing, worked with his mother and some industry friends to make sure their burgers stood out.

And they do, thanks to a premium blend of chuck, short rib and brisket perfectly caramelized on a flattop grill then placed on a beautiful Valenti's Bakery brioche roll in a variety of styles.

There's everything from the signature Company Classic (\$9.75 single, \$13.25 double) with American cheese, caramelized onions, pickle and special sauce to the bacon cheeseburger (\$10, \$13.50) with thick-cut bacon to the Bikini (\$11) wrapped in lettuce with all the fixins — lettuce, Jersey tomato, pickles and sauce. Gluten-free rolls are also available for \$1.50.

"Every restaurant has burgers on their menu, but so many times they are frozen or prepackaged and slapped on a grill," Roberts says. "I made a very strong point to my mom that I didn't want to have just plain ground beef, that we needed our own blend. I spent a week looking at videos and finding the perfect blend. Then we went to Westside Meats in Rio Grande, and they just gave us the perfect blend for the best price. They are quarter-pound burgers loaded with flavor."

If red meat isn't your thing, check out the turkey burger (\$8.50, \$12.50) with fresh ground turkey, or the 'Bello (\$11.50) with a grilled Portobello mushroom cap stuffed with a Swiss and cheddar cheese blend and finished with lettuce, tomato, caramelized onions and a balsamic glaze.

Baker Burger Company also offers great chicken. Whether you get the Crispy Clucker (\$7) with pickles and signature sauce or the deluxe version (\$8) with lettuce and tomato, you can't go wrong thanks to their homemade dredge and fresh chicken. You can get them as Little Cluckers (\$6.60 for five, \$9.50 for eight, \$13.50 for a dozen), which are as crispy and delicious as the



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Kelly Baker and Ethan Roberts are the power duo behind the burgers and baked goods at Baker Burger Co. in Margate.



sandwiches. You can even get them buffalo style.

"Me and my mom were in the house just experimenting with that perfect chicken sandwich," Roberts says. "I said we wouldn't do it if it wasn't fresh. So we soaked all night in buttermilk for tenderness and then came up with this great dredge recipe. We tinkered with it, but we think we have it down now."

There's also some specials you will find such as homemade crab cakes (\$15.99, 5-ounce sandwich served with Old Bay fries) and even beer-battered cod, but make sure you save room for dessert, which some people will tell you is the main event.

That's because Baker, formerly owner of Kelly's Bake Shop in Northfield, is doing her magic in the sweets departments. Like the previous burger place at this loca-

tion, soft-serve ice cream is available, but Baker is doing her thing to amp that side of the business up, too.

Yes, you can grab a fresh-baked cookie on its own, but why not try one in a Snickerdoodle Sundae with Baker's snickerdoodle, vanilla ice cream, caramel and cinnamon sugar. Or one of her homemade ice cream sandwiches (\$6.50) that includes any of her classic cookies filled with vanilla, chocolate or twist ice cream. Or maybe her brownies are your thing? You can have a fudge brownie ice cream sandwich (\$7.75), too.

But the talk of the town has been Baker's pies (prices vary), particularly her blueberry, key lime and fresh Jersey peach.

"I am even surprised by the way pies have sold," Baker says. "This place has become a pie destination, even