



Written by MARIA BELLOS

LOVE AT FIRST BITE

CAKELOVE FOUNDER WARREN BROWN BAKES HIS WAY TO THE TOP

Lawyer-turned-baker-turned-entrepreneur **Warren Brown** has a lot to celebrate.

He's the man who's single-handedly giving New York City's Magnolia Bakery a run for its cupcake money. He's the owner of District dessert depots Cakelove and Love Café on U Street, steadily gaining converts to their brand of sugary survival. He's inspired *Tasty* show host Ann Curry to eat cake on air and like it, and has even brought his cakes on *Oprah*. *Inc. Magazine* named Brown one of this year's 26 Most Fascinating Entrepreneurs alongside the likes of Martha Stewart, Michael Dell and Craigslist founder Craig Newmark. In September, Brown will open a new bakery in Silver Spring and there are plans for another in suburban Maryland.

Marvelous Market has even started carrying his crack-like cupcakes (try one and you're hooked—I promise). By 2007, he'll publish a cookbook that will "take the mystery out of making cakes" for present and potential Cakelove fans.

Not all that bad, for someone who's only been at it in D.C. for 10 years—just imagine what the next 10 will bring!

SWEET BEGINNINGS

A Cleveland native, Brown came to Washington, D.C., in 1995 for law school, receiving his JD and a master's in public health in 1998. Initially, he went to work as a government lawyer, but wanting to exercise his creativity he bought a baking book and tried his hand at the sweet stuff. Turns out, not only did he excel at it, but Brown and his lucky patrons loved his work.

He began moonlighting—"cakelighting,"

you might say—and eventually made the leap to full-time "cakeloving." Brown used seed money from his day job at the outset, but was eventually forced to secure a loan through the Small Business Administration. This allowed him to open the now ubiquitous Cakelove, a made-to-order bakery, in his neighborhood in March 2002. At first, he only employed a few volunteer part-time staff, but media attention drove his business and it grew. In August 2003, Love Café—a friendly café just made for sitting around all day working through your food coma after eating something savory and something sweet—across the street was born.

IN IT FOR THE LOVE

Business is booming in the U Street neighborhood, but Brown isn't afraid of competition. In fact, he says that competition spurs more business. "It's the cluster effect,"

Brown started. The business owner hopes that U Street will continue to grow its selection of food and shopping options, and shows support for local businesses by participating in a "Shoppers' Social" every third Thursday of the month where businesses stay open later and offer specials to their customers (see our "On The Rack" column this month for details). Brown offers discounts on hot chocolate and cupcakes—if that doesn't put you in a happy mood to go spend money, I don't know what will!

When it's not Third Thursday, Love Café serves a growing U Street population. Brown reports seeing more breakfast and weekday lunch customers, in part prompting an expansion of his lunch menu. Lunch includes salads, soups and sandwiches in exotic flavors like tandoori tofu, with a selection of coffees and fruit smoothies. Breakfast boasts four flavors of fritatas and other hearty, start-your-day goodies.

And let's face it: the real reason you came in here is for dessert. You won't leave disappointed. Cupcakes, the house specialty, come in flavors like strawberry icing on chocolate cake and hazelnut spice on vanilla. Buzz Balls, a twist on the éclair, come in lemon and mango as well as chocolate on chocolate. Crunchy Feet, mini pound cakes, come in flavors like "Sassy," a cayenne inflected variety, or more traditional tastes. With regard to cakes, Strawberries & Cream (vanilla cake with vanilla buttercream icing and strawberries between the layers) and "My Downfall" (a cake advertised as a way for chocolate lovers to "gleefully take [their downfall] in stride") top the bestseller list.

NOW FOR DESSERT

It's OK to admire Brown and his work from afar—he's done a lot for the burgeoning neighborhood. But why would you want to? Let's eat!

Cakelove: 1506 U Street NW, 202-588-7100, cakelove.com. Love Café: 1501 U Street NW, 202-265-9800.