

# The Argus-Press

## Woman's simple dessert gains national acclaim

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By SEAN ELY, Argus-Press Staff Writer

DURAND — Brenda Austin has been making her family's masterpiece Graham Cracker Deluxe dessert for years.

But it was only recently the Durand native's creation was discovered by a national mail-order company called Gooseberry Patch. The company specializes in publishing top-notch recipes and has sold 8 million copies of more than 150 various cookbook styles since 1992.

The dessert, introduced to her by her mother, is featured in hardcover "Dinners on a Dime," a 224-page cookbook listing delicious, hearty and budget-friendly recipes for everyday family meals including a fun chapter equipped with thrifty recipes for entertaining and special-occasion dinners. The book was released in January.

"I submitted the recipe two years ago and it was finally picked up," Austin said. "It's a family favorite and I always take it to family picnics and gatherings. It's a hit."

Austin's best memories are of her mother making the dish with her as a girl. Now that her mother is older, she returns the favor and makes it herself.

"We get hundreds of recipes every week through our Web site," said Janie Reed, Gooseberry Patch's creative manager. "We select the best ones that apply to our various themes — getting an understanding of what the customer is looking for." Gooseberry Patch normally sticks to easy-to-make recipes, boasting a simple and down home-style culture.

"Nothing too exotic, something you can cook with items in your pantry," Reed said.

And Austin's dessert hits the nail on the head in that category.

Graham Cracker Deluxe includes french vanilla pudding, 2 percent milk, thawed whipped topping and loads of graham crackers.

"Dinners on a Dime" tells the behind-the-recipe story of each submitter — why the food item means so much to so many people.

Reed said the blurbs add a little special something to the book, making people confident to try it out themselves

Not only has Austin's family been making it for years, but she's finding that confidence in her children, passing it along to Rose, 14, and Rachel, 13, who are students at Durand Middle School, and Joshua, 9, of Doyle Knight Elementary.

Her husband James is a big fan too.

Her family raves about it, and sometimes find it difficult to hold in their excitement.

"They just all love it. You have to make it a day before it's served, to cool down, so that really kills them," she said laughing.

The Austins travel to roughly 20 family picnics every summer with dozens and dozens of family members, never without a large batch of Graham Cracker Deluxe.

And Reed added that even internally, at Gooseberry Patch, staff members find the most revered meals are those you can pack up when you're headed out the door in the morning.

"Cookbooks are always going to have a version of green bean casserole, but it's the unique parts of a dish, like Brenda's, that you haven't heard before, something you can easily make for a potluck."

Austin has been reading and collecting Gooseberry Patch cookbooks for nine years — making her recent debut in "Dinners on a Dime" a true honor.

"When they sent me my free cookbook, that was a big deal," she added.

Other recipes in the book include Speedy Stroganoff, Honey-Wheat Bread and S'More Dessert Please. "Dinners on a Dime" is available for \$16.95 at

[www.gooseberrypatch.com](http://www.gooseberrypatch.com).

As for another recipe possibly hitting a nationally-recognized cookbook?

Austin smiles.

“We’ll see, I’m still debating what I can submit, I have a lot of different little things.”

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