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# Courier News

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

## 'Creative excitement'



Molli Dowd, owner of Edible Estates, features some of her gingerbread creations and gingerbread house kits at her home in Morristown, N.J., on Monday. TANYA BREEN

### Trained architect builds elaborate gingerbread houses

Susan Bloom Asbury Park Press | USA TODAY NETWORK

As America celebrates National Gingerbread House Day today, there's a plethora of standard gingerbread homes to choose from, but why not elevate the experience by upgrading to a gingerbread mansion, cozy cottage, historic building, or even a famous fictional setting? • Welcome to Molli Dowd's world and her eight-year-old Basking Ridge-based business, Edible Estates. • "Gingerbread is so nostalgic and is a creative material I love to work with," said Dowd, a Morris County resident who builds custom gingerbread houses for private customers and corporations. She also offers unique gingerbread house kits that enable recipients to enjoy all of the fun of this treasured holiday pastime without any of the hassle.

An Arizona native who moved to New Jersey (her husband's home state) more than 20 years ago, the launch of Edible Estates in 2015 embodies all of Dowd's lifelong skills and passions.

"As a kid, I loved building gingerbread houses and would construct them in different styles every year," said Dowd, a trained architect and landscape designer whose baking skills landed her on The Food Network's "Gingerbread Showdown" in December 2021. ("Though my partner and I didn't win, we created a huge - and slightly unwieldy -- replica of New York City's Chrysler Building and brought the drama!" she joked.)

Custom gingerbread houses she has created for clients - which start at \$1,800 - include everything from Hamptons-

style beach homes to replicas of the circa-1900 Benjamin Duke House in New York City, the Montclair Film building in Montclair, N.J., the MassMutual Building in Massachusetts, and even a replica of Netflix's "Bridgerton" mansion, a structure whose exterior curves required Dowd to engage in some out-of-the-box engineering.

"But we love challenges, like working windows into intricate designs and capturing how different roof lines intercept," she said. "The things that are difficult are what motivate me and make me tick." Attention to those details, she added, "makes for an even greater presentation in a smaller format."

See ARCHITECT, Page 11A

### RARITAN VALLEY LINE

## Could commuters get direct service to NYC?

Sal DiMaggio  
Correspondent

With the initial steps being taken to begin construction of a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River to Manhattan, a bill co-sponsored by Reps. Tom Kean and Bonnie Watson Coleman asking the federal Department of Transportation to study the effects of transfers on commuting behavior has been passed by the House of Representatives.

The bill is another push toward advocating one-seat rides to Manhattan on NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Line.

Raritan Valley Line commuters during rush hours must change trains in Newark to go to and from Manhattan.

NJ Transit has implemented off-peak hour one-seat service by using

See COMMUTERS, Page 3A

## Feds open investigation into antisemitic incidents at Rutgers

Mary Ann Koruth  
NorthJersey.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

The Biden administration has opened a civil rights investigation into Rutgers University's Newark campus over alleged antisemitism, as universities come under increasing scrutiny about how they handle free speech and bullying amid student protests over the Israel-Hamas war.

Antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents on school and university campuses fall under the purview of the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education.

An "investigation of a complaint has been opened related to alleged incidents of harassment in October and

See RUTGERS, Page 5A

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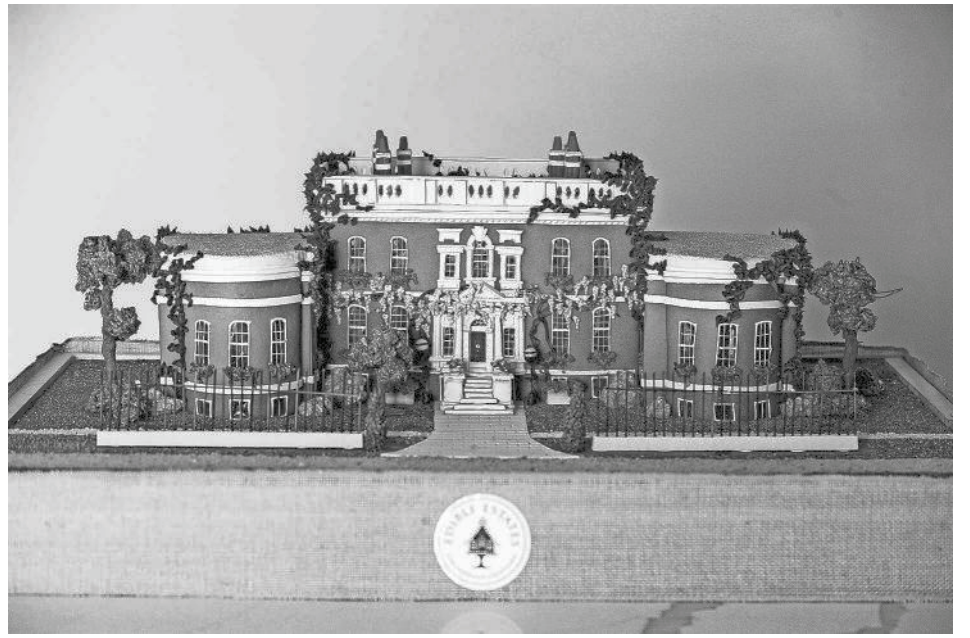
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Molli Dowd, owner of Edible Estates, features a gingerbread house she created for Hillcrest Farms in Verona at her home in Morristown, NJ Monday.

PHOTOS BY TANYA BREEN



## Architect

Continued from Page 1A

### How can you make a Dowd gingerbread house?

When an order comes in, “we take a photo of the house or building and then scale it, make a pattern, bake it, and decorate it,” Dowd said of the process she and her team members (up to 10 of them) undertake. “Houses are built in stages – from designing to baking, drying, and decorating – and usually take anywhere from 30 to 45 person-hours to complete.”

As for the big reveals? “Customers are blown away when they see the finished product,” she said. “It’s such a wow moment.”

But Dowd is all about spreading the joy, and in her mission to “deliver happiness one gingerbread house at a time,”

she also makes a series of upscale DIY kits available so that everyone can enjoy the time-honored pleasure of building a gingerbread house – a holiday tradition whose origins are believed to date back to early 1800s Germany.

“We currently offer three different kits, including a 7-to-8-inch-tall traditional cottage, which normally sells for \$150 but is being offered for the special price of \$125 this holiday season and comes complete with a box of candy, sprinkle set, and frosting bag, as well as a 9-inch-tall classic Tudor-inspired home for \$275, which includes edible paints, pre-made wreaths and greenery, and other details made out of sugar for decorating,” Dowd said. For those who like to “go big or go home,” “we also offer a 12-inch tall ‘luxé’ colonial gingerbread house kit for \$500 that features a lot more detail, pre-made decorations, and plenty of space around the perimeter for recipients to do ‘landscaping.’” Dowd’s kits also feature interior fairy lights to make the final

construct come alive.

“Gingerbread houses are very labor-intensive, so this takes out all of the hard work of baking and offers the essence of this beautiful tradition in the ease of a box; you can then go from there and make it your own,” she said. “It’s like a huge, happy gift that brings joy and creative excitement to people of all ages.” And even canines can get in on the fun, as she plans to drop a special gingerbread house made of pet-friendly biscuits for under \$50 this month (check [www.edibleestates.com](http://www.edibleestates.com) for more information on this limited-edition treat).

### ‘I love delivering happiness’

Looking ahead, Dowd plans to continue bringing the joy year-round as she launches her new brick-and-mortar space in Basking Ridge in mid-2024.

“Our retail space is all about creating edible experiences where people can come in and decorate gingerbread year-

round – from gingerbread houses to Jersey Shore-themed surfboard or sandal cookies or any theme you can think of,” she said. “We provide all of the edible ingredients and guests bring their creativity and just have fun with friends and family.”

Ultimately, “I love delivering happiness,” Dowd said of her favorite part of the job. “These houses make very special and unique gifts and it feels good to create something that brings people joy.”

The icing on the cake ... or roof? “We came up with a great gingerbread recipe, so the houses taste great,” Dowd said. “But if you’re hesitant to eat the artwork, we also include gingerbread cookies with every project so that people can still enjoy gingerbread this season.”

And if gingerbread isn’t your thing, don’t fret. “We also have pumpkin spice and sugar cookies and kits during the year,” she said.

For more information, visit Edible Estates at [www.edibleestates.com](http://www.edibleestates.com).