

LEWIS & COOPER

• PURVEYORS OF FINE FOOD AND WINE SINCE 1899 •

PRESS RELEASE

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Store wins top award for gluten-free Christmas offering

MANY hours spent refining a festive favourite for customers with a wheat intolerance have paid off for fine food firm Lewis & Cooper.

Not only has the Northallerton store clinched a coveted three star Gold Great Taste Award for its gluten-free handmade plum pudding, but the same rich and fruity delight – in which the traditional flour and breadcrumbs are replaced with wheat-free ingredients such as carrot, apple, rice and other flours – has just been named the runner-up in the awards' best speciality from Yorkshire and Humber category.

The 2008 Great Taste Award – bestowed by the Guild of Fine Food – joins a host of other prizes secured by Lewis & Cooper for its scrumptious puddings, which are produced all year round to a century-old family recipe by a team of eight women in a Northallerton kitchen, where the firm's famous Christmas cakes are also made.

General manager, Victoria Howard, said: "I am really impressed that our gluten-free puddings have gained a three star gold in the Great Taste Awards, as often gluten-free products don't taste that good and are not a good seller.

"This just shows that people with special dietary requirements do not have to miss out when it comes to taste and quality."

To underline this fact, Lewis & Cooper also took a one star Gold award this year for its vegetarian handmade plum pudding.

In last year's contest, the traditional handmade plum pudding – complete with beef suet and wheatflour – took a three star gold. Competition rules prevent the same products from being entered two years running, but it also took gold awards in 2003 and 2005, a silver in 2001 and bronze in 1999.

Production manager Wendy Robinson said her team had made a staggering 44,000 plum puddings last year, as well as 20,000 Christmas cakes. The tally for

2008 is set to be even higher, especially as demand grows for the gluten-free variety, which was born of customer demand three years ago.

"It took a bit of experimenting to get it right," she recalled. "But they taste just as good as the others. We are thrilled to bits about the awards."

Lewis & Cooper puddings and cakes go all over the world. Each pudding must mature for six months before it even leaves the site; they carry on getting better and better for up to three years.

Lewis & Cooper is unusual among Great Taste Award winners in that it not only makes several prizewinners, but also stocks many more in its outlets in Northallerton and Yarm – and via www.lewisandcooper.co.uk.

For example, the stores are proud to stock the product that pipped its pudding to the prize for best regional speciality food, Swaledale Goats' Milk Cheese, from Richmond's Swaledale Cheese Company.

More than ten per cent of the 1,124 products named as one, two or three-star Gold award winners this year are already stalwarts on Lewis & Cooper's shelves – among its staggering 30,000 lines. The most popular ones range from Black Sheep Ale and sloe gin from North Yorkshire to Sri Lankan-style cooking sauces from Merseyside.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Please find enclosed a picture of production supervisor Jenette [CORR] England with two of the award-winning handmade gluten-free plum puddings.

- For more details, please contact Gareth Dant on 01609 760059 or 07929 869269.

- The Northallerton store is at 92 High Street, telephone 01609 772880; in Yarm, it is within Strickland & Holt at 44 High Street, telephone 01642 802147. Or visit www.lewisandcooper.co.uk. The Northallerton store is open 8.30-5.30 Monday-Friday, 8am-5.30pm on Saturday and 10am-4pm on Sunday.

- The Great Taste Awards, organised by the Guild of Fine Food, are regarded as the authoritative, independent standard for Britain's fine food sector. Bob Farrand, director of the Guild, said: "These awards have been running for 15 years now and are a recognised mark of excellence that consumers can trust and rely on. The winning products have been through a thorough judging process and we are able to assure consumers that the Great Taste Award logo, which all award winners can use, signifies genuine, proven fine food. This is not some supermarket premium marketing slogan that bears almost no relation to the quality of the food in the packet."

Gold award winners were whittled down from 4,753 entries during three rounds of judging.

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