



LESLIE HARLIB

Cuisine scene

## Holiday table not really set without pie

**I**T'S PIE SEASON. Thanksgiving's a week away. And the likelihood is that, whatever else your holiday menu features, pie will on it somewhere.

Christine Milne's Upper Crust Pies, made in San Rafael, gets so busy around holiday time, its normal production of 3,000 pies a week ramps up to five times that, says company spokesperson Christine Hildebrand.

For the holidays, Upper Crust has released four seasonal items: a plush pumpkin/amaretto with an almond-laced cookie-like crust; a rich cranapple, with apples and cranberries under a buttery crumb topping; a pecan pie and classic pumpkin.

"The beauty of these pies is that they have a homemade taste," says Hildebrand.

I get a kick out of the company story. Milne, now a San Anselmo resident, started baking pies at home in 1988 to help herself through a difficult period in her personal life. Now she's one of the best-known pie bakers in the Bay Area; her products are sold by 150 retailers.

Purists avoiding trans-fats may not like the fact that some of the pies are made with a part-butter, part shortening crust. However, pies they create for the Whole Foods chain are made with butter and canola oil crusts. And no matter what's in the crust, the fillings are all-natural, fresh and taste authentic. To my taste, none of them are too sweet — a big plus.

Hildebrand says the demand for alternative shortening is great enough that, in January 2005, the company plans to make some changes.

"We will finalize some new recipes," says Hildebrand. "One will be for a gluten-free, wheat-free and sugar-free crust. We're also looking at alternatives to traditional vegetable shortening to address the trans-fats challenge."

Upper Crust makes 6-inch and 8-inch pies for general retail; 10-inch pies are available for special order. For a list of sources and more information, call 485-5658 or go online to [www.christinespies.com](http://www.christinespies.com).

Here's the recipe for Upper Crust's Amaretto Pumpkin Pie.