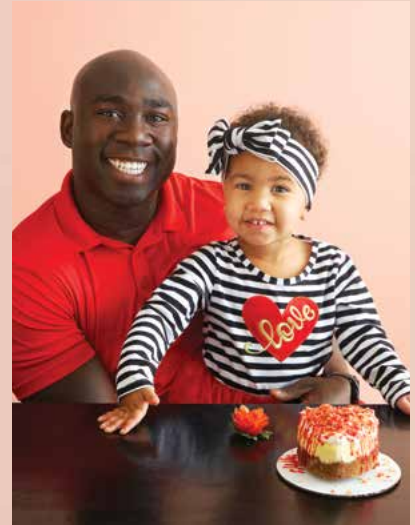HIGH POINT

Say Cheesecake!

After years spent perfecting his signature recipe, Uncle Cheesecake shares his dessert masterpieces with an extended family.

SITTING IN HIS BAKERY ACROSS from an array of cheesecakes adorned with rainbow sprinkles, brightly colored fruit drizzles, and crumbled Oreos, Daniel Monkonjay Gray recalls watching his mother cook his favorite Liberian meals in their kitchen. Gray was a fix-it-himself kind of kid, and one afternoon, he found himself craving his favorite dessert. So at 10 years old, he made his first cheesecake — with a little help from his mom, of course. "I had no good tools," he says. "I used to sweat [while] making it, trying to beat cream cheese with a wooden spoon and a regular bowl."

Gray has since traded in the wooden spoon for massive electric mixers and the home kitchen for his very own cheesecake shop in his hometown of High Point. Known around town as Uncle Cheesecake, Gray created a space for his community to not only enjoy what he calls Carolina-style cheesecake — light, smooth, and delicately sweet — but also be a part of the family. Customers can often see Gray's 2-year-old daughter, Dallas, waddling around the bakery and coming up with new flavors for her dad to try. "That's probably one of the best parts," Gray says, "just to see my daughter completely comfortable in the bakery and finding all the Oreo crumbs she can." — *Katie Kane*

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Daniel Monkonjay Gray made a strawberry shortcake cheesecake (pictured) as a contestant on Food Network's *Chopped*. Now, his daughter, Dallas (above), gets to dig in.