

She baked her first cupcakes when she was just 10 years old.

Last year, she won the Food Network Christmas Cookie Challenge.

And now, she's making spectacular desserts as the new executive pastry chef at Ballantyne Country Club.

Brittani Brooker joined the Club in late spring, attracted by the family-friendly atmosphere and the opportunity to continue developing her craft. She was most recently executive pastry chef at Palm Beach Marriott Singer Island Beach Resort & Spa, where she managed a pastry team, developed recipes for three restaurants and a bakery, designed wedding cakes, and created modern plated desserts.

Her Instagram account (@lifeofapastrychef) is a way to oogle the sweets of your dreams. Check out the white chocolate raspberry marshmallow tarts, flower cupcakes, s'mores "pop tarts," and cake shaped like a purse!

In her own family, "everyone cooked but no one baked," she says. She remedied that by earning a degree in pastry and culinary arts at The Art Institute of Charlotte. Her career has taken her back and forth between North Carolina and Florida, including a stint at the famed resort The Breakers in Palm Beach.

Her career highlight so far, though, was probably the Food Network championship. Food Network producers found her from online images of her famed gingerbread house. (We're talking a gingerbread house that's eight feet tall.)

Her talent in three-dimensional edible sculptures served her especially well in the second round of the competition, when the bakers were challenged to make 3D snow globe cookies. Brooker fashioned a globe from isomalt, a sugar substitute. Inside she placed a pasta frolla cookie – an Italian shortbread – shaped like a Christmas tree. The judges loved it.

Brooker's passion for her work is contagious, says Club General Manager Jill Philmon. "Even if you didn't like desserts you would want to eat them for Brittani. She is a ball of energy and so creative. We wanted her to join the team for her amazing talent but also for her wonderful enthusiasm over anything confectionary."

After eight years as a pastry professional, does Brooker have a favorite among her desserts? She loves the "grab and go" advantage of cookies. But she admits her favorite treat is....pulled pork.

