

# CityLife



## The Rachael Way

*She wowed America's daytime culinary queen. Now, Jenn Thomas hopes the EVOO endorsement will help her take her creations public.*

**J**enn Thomas likes to make stuff up: Rocky Road Overload Cookies, New York Pizza Pasta — the sort of dishes you won't find in your mom's recipe stash. Her innovative approach (and a killer lasagna burger) caught the attention of Rachael Ray, who invited the Cuyahoga Falls resident to take part in her "So You Think You Can Cook?!" contest. Thomas earned the top "yum-o" rating, winning a live cooking spot on Ray's daytime show and a trip to an epicurean boot camp at

the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park. We recently got the dish from Thomas about her cooking inspiration, if the Queen of Triscuits can *really* be that bubbly and what's next on her menu.

— *Tori Woods*

### **How did you get interested in cooking?**

When I was little, my mom let me make a huge mess as long as I cleaned it up. Watching her cook and bake, everything she made was from scratch or nearly from scratch. She's re-

ally big on cooking and flavors, and I learned from her. She let me make tuna noodle casserole, cheeseburger macaroni — stuff that's impossible to mess up, but I would. ... If I ruined something, I would discover something else by accident. That's how you learn. Anybody can make phenomenal food out of phenomenal ingredients. If you can make something out of nothing, out of leftovers or cleaning out your fridge, then you know if you can cook or not.

*continued on page 16*

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Rachael  
Ray's  
Cook-off  
Queen

continued from page 14

**What recipe that you've invented is your favorite?**

One of my most fun recipes is the Rocky Road Overload Cookie. I was thinking, *They've made ice creams out of almost every cookie, but haven't made cookies out of ice cream.* It's like a huge piece of cake when you're done, but they're so good!

**How did you get on the TV show?**

I had to make an audition tape. ... It was the first time I ever made lasagna burgers. We sent it in on a Thursday, and they called me on a Monday. I thought my mom was pranking me! Then I was in New York on Thursday morning. It was all really fast.

**What's Rachael really like?**

I'm a huge fan, so finally meeting her was really cool. She's a doll, she's just how she is on TV in real life. ... She has a kind heart and a lot of energy. She has more energy in real life than on TV, if you believe it! She's very easy to talk to.

**What were the recipes that clinched your win?**


The challenge was to make hors d'oeuvres for [actress] Marcia Cross. I made filet tartar stuffed with goat cheese, and toast with prosciutto and kalamata olives. I also made a cheese ball and spread it onto toast that was cut into wedges. It was cream cheese, white onion, green pepper and pineapple juice. Everybody said that was the winner.

**What's next for you?**

I'm working on a cookbook and trying to get my own show. ... I'm trying to do some spots on Cleveland TV, just to get on camera. It's funny, I feel more natural cooking in front of the camera than not.

**Your best tip for other home cooks?**

Just go into the kitchen and just do it. ... You can't just read and read and read. Even the night I got home after winning, I made the most disgusting thing I've ever made. I threw it out and went to Taco Bell. It's all about trial and error, and just practicing.

 **Check out cold-weather recipes Jenn Thomas created for our readers at [www.clevelandmagazine.com](http://www.clevelandmagazine.com).**