

Marcus Leslie has loved baking since he was a child, but only discovered his passion for making cheesecakes after attending a friend's dinner party where homemade cheesecake was served. Having never considered the fact that the traditionally chilled dessert must first be baked like any other cake, Leslie became fascinated with baking cheesecakes of his own – first serving them at get-togethers at his home then making them for friends and eventually transitioning the hobby into a fledgling business.

After developing his cheesecake recipes for 10 years from his home, Leslie began renting space in Lansing's [Allen Neighborhood Center's incubator kitchens](#) to keep up with the demands of his growing business, Mr. Leslie's Cheesecakes. The Center's kitchens offer potential food-industry entrepreneurs the chance to explore the culinary business without having to invest in the industrial equipment necessary to make customer-ready products and quantities. Leslie partnered with the Center to get licensed and begin building relationships with other makers in the community, even mentoring a young man interested in being an entrepreneur one day.

"We found Mr. Leslie's Cheesecakes at Allen Neighborhood Center. He was the epitome of the local vendor we were looking for. It was a passion of his that he decided to turn into a business and the cheesecake is to die for," said Mitch Cook, Capital City Market Store Manager, who has found many local brands for the market's shelves through his partnership with the Center.

As a Detroit-native, Leslie hopes this partnership will help him spread into other areas of the state so his family in Detroit can one day see his products on shelves.

"When I met with [Capital City Market], they said it's not just about me selling the product and making them money, it's really about them actually helping me succeed as a new business owner and branch out to other markets within the company and to other companies as well," Leslie said. "They were very interested in helping me facilitate my growth."

Leslie knows that his brand is truly a product of his community – from his family who put up with "many late nights and early mornings" to the Allen Neighborhood Center that gave him the resources he needed to succeed.

"It's an awesome experience because people can see that it can be done," Leslie said. "You can start a business and it might take some time and a lot of hard work, but you can not only live in the community but also be someone who provides to the community, which is a great thing."

Capital City Market, the new neighborhood grocery store by Meijer and one of the first grocery stores in downtown Lansing, will open Oct. 14, carrying Mr. Leslie's turtle and strawberry swirl cheesecakes.

Additional assets available online: _____ (2)

<https://meijercommunity.com/2020-10-13-Capital-City-Market-to-Introduce-Homegrown-Cheesecake-Brand>