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Rising up: Old Labor Hall celebrates historic milestones



Andy Shapiro (holding a historical photograph of the original bakery) leads a tour of the soon-to-open Rise Up Bakery next to the Old Labor Hall in Barre on Monday.

Josh Kuckens/Staff Photo



Elias Carpenter, 9, and Sarah Capron, of Northfield, construct paper roses as part of Labor Day celebrations on Monday at the Old Labor Hall in Barre.

Josh Kuckens/Staff Photo



Andy Shapiro leads a tour of the Rise Up Bakery located next to the Old Labor Hall in Barre on Monday.

Josh Kuckens/Staff Photo

By STEPHEN MILLS
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BARRE – Rising to the occasion was an apt response to Labor Day at The Old Labor Hall on Monday.

The historic landmark was the center of a dynamic duo of community celebrations that included a review of the hall's historic role in accepting children seeking safety and sanctuary from the 1912 "Bread and Roses" strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Events to mark the event and Labor Day included readings from "Bread and Roses Too," a book about the strike and flight of children to Barre by local celebrated children's author Katherine Paterson. Companion events included children's activities, and "Solidarity Forever – Songs of Union and Labor," a musical presentation by educator and musician Mark Greenberg.

But it was also a milestone moment to celebrate the revival of the nearby Rise Up Bakery, marking the close of a three-year project to rebuild and reignite the brick-oven bakery, formerly called the Union Cooperative Store Bakery.

A labor of love, the project has relied on countless hours of work and willing hands, and federal, state and local funding, as well as a Kickstarter campaign to complete the \$275,000 project to revive and reopen the bakery, built in 1913 and closed in 1940.

"If we can raise another \$10,000 to complete the project, we will be in heaven," said project coordinator Carolyn Shapiro.

Shapiro has led a concerted community campaign to fire up the bakery again with the help of YouthBuild and other local students, who helped with putting on a new roof, as well as repointing brickwork for the building and the oven. Experts also pitched in to recreate the classic brick oven, and bake bread the old-fashioned way.

The fruits of their labor were on display Monday with the first batch of bread on display during tours of the bakery. It was the first time bread had been baked in that space in more than 70 years. Shapiro endured the adulation of many who spoke highly of her tireless efforts, and she in turn praised the many people who helped her.

A lively discussion ensued, with details emerging about the metamorphosis of the building into a second life.

One visitor revealed that the original bread paddles were found in the attic when the building was reopened. Another visitor said he had heard that the original bread pans were thought to still be at a nearby granite shed. The bricks from the old oven, after it was dismantled, ended up being used as the foundation for a new floor of the building when it was converted into a storage shed after the bakery closed in 1940. Salvaged bricks from the Old Labor Hall were used to build the new brick oven.

On hand were some of the key players in rebuilding the oven, including Daniel Wing, of Corinth, who co-wrote a 1999 book, "The Bread Builders," about the brick oven technology. He also crafted tools on the ends of long poles, including a poker and a rake, to adjust the burning logs and remove ash, and a scuffle, a wet-cloth mop used to wipe fine ash off the bottom of the oven.

Jamie Duggan, who helped build the core of the oven, got involved as an extension of his work with the Division of Historic Preservation to save historic buildings like the bakery. A few of the students who had taken part in the oven construction with Duggan were on hand Monday to show off their handiwork to family and friends.

On the baking end of the project, significant help came from nearly a dozen central Vermont baking businesses, offering expertise and advice on the finer points of baking sourdough bread that was a staple of the Italian community that grew up around the granite industry.

Dave Dickson, of Woodbelly Pizza, in Montpelier, baked the bakery's first batch of bread Monday, and some visitors during the tour were lucky enough to receive some of the loaves.

Organizers hope to attract a part-time baker to help use the bakery as a training school for culinary arts students from Central Vermont Career Center Bake Shop, Capstone Community Kitchen Academy Program and New England Culinary Institute.

The last stage in the project will involve connecting a sewer line to the building, and hooking up water and some electrical services to make the building code-compliant and safe for staff, students and visitors.

"The comment from the fire department was, 'Looks great, when's the pizza party!'" quipped Wing.

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