

Rising up

Granite Street bakery hopes to be cooking on Labor Day

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Workers install bricks on the dome of a bread oven Thursday as efforts continue to resurrect the bakery by the Old Labor Hall in Barre. From left are oven expert Dan Wing, of Corinth, master builder Jeremiah Church of Boreal Heat, Carolyn Shapiro, chairwoman of the bakery project, and Jamie Duggan from the State Division for Historic Preservation. JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR / STAFF PHOTO

BARRE — You can't bake bread without dough.

Carolyn Shapiro prepares to cut a brick Thursday while working on the new oven for the Rise Up Bakery in Barre. JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR / STAFF PHOTO

While Carolyn Shapiro will tell you the Rise Up Bakery is still about \$70,000 shy of being fully functional, don't bet against its ovens cranking out a few loaves by Labor Day.

That's the new goal for an old brick structure that was built behind the Old Labor Hall on



Granite Street in 1913 and housed the Union Cooperative Bakery until the day it closed in 1940. Guttled, sold and used as storage space for decades, the building was acquired at auction by two members of the Barre Historical Society in 2004 and has been a pet project spearheaded by Shapiro since 2015.

A successful Kickstarter campaign, several grants and a lot of work later, Shapiro can almost taste the bread that could soon be baked in the building thanks to work that was done this week. Though it isn't quite finished, the core of a wood-fired brick oven was assembled by a crew led by master oven builder and Morrisville native Jeremiah Church. Though Church moved to Oregon with his business, Boreal Heat, two years ago, he was back in Vermont this week for a five-day project that is scheduled to be finished today.

There are still doors and a chimney to be added, but as soon as that work is done, Church said the new oven will be capable of comfortably producing 150 loaves — in “five bakes” — during a single firing. The oven that Church built with the helping hands of volunteers, like Montpelier resident Jamie Duggan and Daniel Wing of Corinth, will be finished long before the final phase of fundraising needed to pay for the last leg of the project.

The bakery building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, doesn't have any electricity or mechanical systems, will need to be hooked into municipal sewer line located a parking lot away, and must be made accessible in order to serve as a tourist attraction and teaching facility. The hope is to attract a part-time baker while making the facility available for culinary programs offered by the Central Vermont Career Center, Capstone Community Action and possibly the New England Culinary Institute.

“We're getting there,” Shapiro said, noting the latest round of work is being financed through a \$30,000 grant obtained through USDA Rural Development. The federal funding is paying for most of the equipment, including the brick oven, a mixer, sinks and seven maple tables being built by students in Dave Bazis' shop class at U-32 Middle and High School. Shapiro said she'll have no trouble spending the money by the June deadline and has already applied for other grants — some from organizations like the Bay & Paul Foundations that have funded earlier phases of the project, and others that haven't.

There is a sense of urgency because Shapiro would like work to be finished and the bakery fully functional by September. That's because the Vermont Humanities Council has chosen “Bread and Roses, Too” by Katherine Paterson as its Vermont Reads book this year. Paterson is an award-winning children's author who lives in Barre Town, and the title and the subject of her book have Shapiro eager to fire up the oven come Labor Day.

The novel tells the story of the 1912 “Bread and Roses” strike in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile mills through the eyes of an Italian-American girl and a runaway boy. Though the book is a piece of historical fiction, the fact that Barre hosted the children of striking textile workers at the time is one of the reasons the Old Labor Hall earned its designation as a National Labor Landmark.

Though the bakery out back wasn't built until a year after the strike, Shapiro would like to put some bread into a community celebration of “Bread and Roses”. “I'd really like to be able to bake bread for that,” she said. “I've got good people lined up and ready to go.”

The oven will be ready when Shapiro gets the “dough” she needs.