

Rising to the occasion: Bakery with long history rejuvenated

By Stephen Mills Staff Writer



Head baker Jim Haas checks the temperature of the oven Monday ahead of Wednesday's grand opening of Rise Up Bakery in Barre.

[Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo](#)

BARRE — All, rise!

On Wednesday, Rise Up Bakery, formerly the Union Cooperative Store Bakery, will once again offer loaves of bread baked in a brick oven following a five-year restoration of the building.

Every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m., the bakery will offer fresh loaves of sourdough and other breads for sale. The bakery next to the Old Labor Hall is also being eyed as a training facility for students from the Central Vermont Career Center and Capstone Community Action's Community Kitchen Academy.

The final ingredient in the recipe for success in saving the building and business was the appointment of baker Jim Haas to run the facility.

Haas started Monday, preparing the first batches of sourdough that will go into the wood-fired brick oven at 9 a.m. Wednesday. "On Wednesday, it's kind of cool to think that this bakery is going to do exactly what it was meant to do at the beginning of the 20th century and the first half of the 20th century — to feed the people of Barre," Haas said.

Built in 1913, the building was an extension of the cooperative grocery store that operated at the nearby Old Labor Hall, and was established to meet the growing demand among the city's Italian immigrants for traditional bakery products.

The building was flooded during Vermont's devastating 1927 floods and only remained open for another two years. It was used briefly by a private bakery between 1936 and 1940 before becoming storage space for local granite companies.

In 2004, the building was acquired by members of the Barre Historical Society to prevent its demolition and restore the bakery. In 2015, labor hall activist Carolyn Shapiro launched a capital campaign to raise the \$250,000 needed to restore the building with the help of local, state and federal grants.

Along the way, Shapiro also secured the support of experts to rebuild the brick oven and restore the building. She enlisted the support of the nearby ReStore Youth Build program to provide labor and vocational programming. Students from U-32 Middle and High School also built tables that will be used for dough preparation, culinary master classes and public workshops. A Montpelier High School student took part in the rebuilding and repointing of the brick oven.

For Haas, the bakery is a slice of serendipity.

He was only too happy to follow in the footsteps of the first bakers in the building, Batista Fumagalli and Joseph Piccolini.

Haas said the bakery opened a door for his return to Vermont from Ukraine, where he started AgroEast Baking and Milling Company, the country's commercial wood-fired bakery, in 2006. Born in New Jersey, Haas spent his youth in Danby before moving after college — where he learned Russian — to Ukraine in 1991. For several years, he worked in corporate finance for three Western investors in Ukraine's food and agriculture sectors. Haas met and then married his wife, Larissa, in 1992, and they have three sons. His wife will help with marketing Rise Up Bakery. Haas said it was his years growing up in a food- and nutrition-conscious family in Vermont that inspired him to become a baker, milling organic grains and learning the finer points of European-style breads to share with the residents of Kiev, Ukraine's capital. "We realized that because Ukrainians really didn't know how to work with whole grain flours, we decided that we better bake some bread as well, so we started that too," Haas said.

"In Ukraine, a lot of other bakeries started to appear, a lot of them based on our model," he added.

This year, Haas and his wife decided to return to the United States. He answered a notice in the Bakers' Guild newsletter placed by the Barre Historical Society, looking for a baker for Rise Up Bakery, and was accepted.

Haas traveled to Barre in May to view the bakery and was set to start soon afterwards but was delayed when asked to help a friend start a bakery in Nantucket, Massachusetts, after the prospective baker at that location dropped out.

“When they were up and running, I came back here to Barre,” Haas said.

Haas is also keen to teach and plans to hold master classes for students twice a year, along with regular workshops for people who want to “learn the fundamentals of a 6,000-year-old craft.” Haas hopes to start the workshops within a month and is also working on a website to promote the bakery. Haas hopes to add limited runs of pastries, and pies and cakes by the slice, and for wholesale markets.

Haas said he is inspired by a historical photo of the bakery's first two bakers in the building.

“They were feeding the quarrymen, and I'm having ideas about doing a bake for those quarry guys and I just want to reach out to them,” Haas said.

For more information, call Larissa Haas at 401-396-6694.