

Bagels & More celebrates 20 years in downtown Beloit

MARCY REEDY Special to the Beloit Daily News | Posted: Saturday, October 1, 2016 10:00 am

BELOIT — The idea of opening their own restaurant came to David and Joan Siekierski in the mid 1990s when they saw the popularity of fresh bread bakeries and bagel shops popping up everywhere.

Now, as they look forward to celebrating 20 years in business on Oct. 6, they have been reflecting on the evolution of Bagels & More, 324 State St.

"We both had worked in the restaurant business," said Joan. "David (grew up) in his parents' successful family owned restaurant, Buffa's Supper Club."

Joan also had worked at Buffa's and honed her cooking and baking skills at the Rockton Inn and Country Store West.

"With our respective background and current food trends to inspire us, we spent the next two years developing a business plan, surveying locals in the area, test baking recipes and searching for a suitable location," Joan said.

The current Bagels & More building was chosen for its location and historic qualities. David personally gutted the interior of the building which had previously been a clothing store. Removing three dropped ceilings revealed a beautiful historic tin ceiling. Retaining the historical significance of the store's interior has continued to contribute to the appeal of this family-owned business.

The labor of love resulted in a total transformation of the interior, and Bagels & More became an anchor for the downtown business district from the day it opened its doors in October 1996.

The work on the restaurant was so remarkable that it received a Main Street Award for "Best Interior Renovation," citing the owners' "Dedication to Downtown Revitalization, Economic Development and Historic Preservation has set the standard for all Wisconsin Main Street Communities."

The Siekierski's also were acknowledged by the Downtown Beloit Association (DBA) in recognition of the "Adaptive Project Re Use of 324 State Street." The accolades continued when they were acknowledged by the DBA for "Best Façade Restoration over \$10,000" and The Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce "Business of the Year Retail" award in 2009.

In anticipation of the upcoming 20th anniversary of their grand opening, the restaurant has experienced more transformations. It sports a new color scheme, including on the ceiling tiles, as well as new tables and chairs to update the look.



Family time at Bagels & More

Three-year-old Sophia eats with her mom, Adriana Gonzalez, and fiance Peter Nattinger at Bagels & More.

"At Bagels and More, we want to continue to be a destination dining experience that brings visitors to the downtown area," David said. "The hours, days, years of our hard work have helped to make this business as successful as it is."

Longtime patrons eagerly concur.

Sisters Gloria Hereford and Beth Schmuck, along with their friend Arlene Hoover, have been "regulars" since the business opened 20 years ago. The ladies gather at the restaurant three to five days a week, enjoying not only the tasty homemade baked goods, but they enjoy watching the people who come and go.

Hereford, who recently turned 91, celebrated the occasion with a chocolate cupcake and mounds of cream cheese frosting.

"They do a great job, and he (Dave) is always improving the restaurant", she said. "They are always willing to make menu changes to make you happy."

Her sister, Schmuck, who gladly shares that she is 89 and a former Pediatric Nurse, loves the restaurant as their destination.

"I like to get out. You feel good to get out and socialize," Schmuck said. "We've watched families grow up over the years. It's a good way to start your day."

Hoover said she always enjoys coming to the restaurant with her friends.

"We feel like part of David's family," she said.

The Siekierski's said that in addition to the restaurant having a friendly atmosphere, they always keep an eye on food trends to keep customers happy.

Together they developed their menu to reflect the dietary changes that discerning customers requested and have made many changes throughout the years, including adding more whole grains, creating gluten free options, using more organic and fair trade products, adding vegan options and supporting local farmers.

With a nod to caring for the environment, they have even made the switch to biodegradable carry-out containers.

As the renaissance of downtown Beloit began and more businesses took up residence, Dave and Joan looked to expand their operations by offering catering for business meetings. The decision led to catering opportunities as far away as Rockford (Rockton and Roscoe), Illinois, as well as Madison.

"Our marketing tagline is "always on time" for our catering deliveries," Dave said. "And it is taken very seriously."

As an anchor for the downtown business community, Bagels & More has provided stability for the customer base by remaining while other businesses have come and gone. The clientele reflect the community at large, as well.

On any given day or hour, tables may be filled with women from a Jazzercise class, local business owners meeting outside the office, a college student accessing the free wifi to study, or a book club choosing to

discuss the latest selection with a delicious cup of java.

“We extend a welcome mat so that all are welcome,” Joan said.

Those sentiments are echoed by Don Stocker and his wife, Suzanne “Bunny,” who have been traveling to the restaurant from Rockton for 20 years.

“The food is good, good service, very loyal staff and Chef Paul is a great chef,” said Don.

“We feel comfortable here,” said Bunny.

Bagels and More also embraces the special events orchestrated by the DBA by creating complementary goods and services for events such as the Farmers Market Halloween Parade, Holidazzle and Artwalk.

They also enjoy all the items available at the Farmers Market on State Street.

“We spend upwards of \$400 each week to purchase food items to be utilized in our own menu development,” Dave said.

The couple said they have done a lot of reflecting recently, thinking about their 20 years in business.

“We are proud to have been in Beloit for 20 years and watch the city develop. Beloit has been welcoming to us, it is a great place to do business.” Joan said. “We really enjoy how we’ve been able to bring so many people together over the years.”

Their position as an anchor for the Downtown does not go unnoticed by Shauna El-Amin, Executive Director of the Downtown Business Association.

“We are very excited to help Bagels & More celebrate 20 years in business in Downtown Beloit,” said El-Amin. “Throughout the years they have worked tirelessly to have an extremely successful business. We are very happy for them and wish them many more years of success.”