

All Good Bakers

Published by Metroland, May 2012

Britin and Nick Foster asked Annine Everson to make the piñata, which echoes Steve Kroeger's Piece O' Toast sculpture on the wall of their new bakery-café. The sculpture and bakery lived on Quail Street since October 2010, and moved into their new digs on the first day of spring.



The couple are thrilled to have a new space. “The dish room is as big as the kitchen was!” marvels Britin as she gives a tour of the 1,300-square-foot space where the Chocolate Gecko once lived. The café has four tables, and the kitchen is a series of small rooms where they can bake bread, grow a few greens and herbs in a hydroponic setup, and keep themselves—a sous chef and two part-time kitchen/counter staff—busy.

The location is in the neighborhood they’ve called home for almost nine years. They had their eye on the spot for quite a while, especially since the Quail Street storefront had challenges, some related to the liveliness of the student-rich Pine Hills corridor.

Delaware Avenue doesn’t have the same potential for that kind of mayhem, which suits All Good Bakers just fine. Not that the two don’t love a party—Nick plans to go to eight Phish shows this summer—just that business and certain types of pleasure don’t mix. Anyone who has met Britin and Nick knows that fun is a part of their equation, and friendliness is never in short order, whether you encounter them at a farmers market, food event, or in the bakery itself.

Britin and Nick are fixtures at the Delaware Farmers Market. They baked for years in their kitchen, which was approved by the state Department of Agriculture and Markets as a home kitchen. They sold their baked goods at farmers markets, and as the winter of 2010-2011 approached, they decided to start a CSB. This bread-based riff on the Community Supported Agriculture food subscription model allowed them to keep their business going while the markets were quiet. The capital raised by the CSB allowed them to invest money in equipment, like a stand mixer, and also invest more money in ingredients.

“We eat local at home, and working at farmers’ markets, we wanted to incorporate local food into our business,” says Britin. But initially, they couldn’t afford it. “The CSB allowed us to up the ante on our ingredients.”

Selling at farmers markets shaped what they do: bring New York state food to the bakery and café.

“From questions we were asked, we learned what questions to ask farmers and producers,” says Britin. She investigates growing practices, from GMO use to habits for pest control, and learns where producers, like R & G Cheesemakers, get their ingredients.

The connections they’ve made through the Delaware Farmers Market are especially valuable, and helped them not just grow as a business, but grow responsibly, and make using local food in their production not just a possibility, but a reality.

“We go to Farmer Jon’s Produce and pick the food right out of the ground, and they teach us,” says Britin. Learning about vegetable varieties, and how food grows, helps them as they use the food in their kitchen. But the experience matters more, too.

“We get to meet amazing people making incredible food,” Britin says. “We can’t live on a farm right now, so to be able to get our daughter out in the field and see her in the sunlight, in the dirt, picking food, I think there is something very important about that. Very visceral.”

The bakery stitches itself to New York wheat and mills, using North Country Farms whole wheat flour, and organic white flour from Champlain Valley Milling. Right now, they’re using radishes from Farmer Jon’s, mushrooms, onions and potatoes from Bulich Creekside Farms, Healthway’s apples, potatoes and pears, and supplementing from Honest Weight Food Co-op. Britin makes butter every Tuesday, using cream from Meadowbrook Dairy, which supplies all their milk,

too. Pastured eggs come from Bill & Jenny's Backyard, and seitan comes from Tree Smiles Kitchen. And they make a lot of vegan options.

All Good Bakers is also stitched tight to the neighborhood. The building's landlords wanted a community-minded business, and the Chocolate Gecko lives on a little in the space—Nick and Britin worked closely with the Community Loan Fund's Lissa D'Aquanni, the original owner of the chocolate shop. The bakery began working with the Community Loan Fund on a business plan in November, strategizing on how they could take a leap, but not a plunge.

"We've been trying to grow slowly, steadily and incrementally," says Britin.

A part of their operation is renting out affordable kitchen space to other small businesses. As they made the step from home kitchen to commercial space, which they needed to run the CSB, the couple tried first to find a kitchen to rent. They couldn't find what they needed, so they shared the rental on Quail Street with Gatherer's Granola, which now rents at Delaware Avenue, but will be moving to their own space soon. The fact that the two businesses incubated each other is very gratifying, and All Good is glad to incorporate kitchen rentals into their system to help others. The space is now used by caterers and cake makers, like wedding cake baker Kate's Kakes.

Such a well-connected enterprise won't launch alone. Community Loan Fund will cut the ribbon, and the Chef's Consortium will be under tents, serving treats in the same salute-the-local mode. Stop by before the piñata—and other very real breads, stacked with spring bounties—are gone.

The All Good Bakers official grand opening will take place tomorrow (Friday, May 4) at 540 Delaware Avenue, Albany, from 5 to 6:30 PM.