

SPECIAL FEATURE: 10 Years of Jazz Fest—How It Grew So Big

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Baking for betterment

A nonprofit group sets out to change the world, one loaf at a time.

Story and photos by Joseph Sorrentino

Bread For All is a small group with a big agenda. Run through St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, it's a community supported bakery that promotes healthy eating and local foods while providing job training for people out of work. But first things first: Good work won't pay off unless your final product is good, too.

"The bread tastes great—it's organic and healthy," confirms customer Amy Hentschke of Rochester.

Like community supported agriculture, Bread For All sells subscriptions rather than selling its bread retail. Unlike CSAs, there's no work requirement.

According to Peg Gefell, one of the founders and bakers and former owner of Savory Thyme Catering, customers sign up for 10-week blocks. "They get a pound-and-a-half loaf of bread that's all organic," one each week. Subscriptions cost \$40 for the 10 weeks, and prorated subscriptions are available after a 10-week period begins.

Last year's pilot project brought in 40 subscribers. The first session this year had 110. Only the interns, not staff, are paid; money from subscriptions goes toward running the bakery.

The inspiration for the bakery goes back 30 years, when Paul Frazier, another founder and baker at Bread For All, helped organize Glory Be Bakery in Syracuse, part of a prison ministry project. "The idea was to give hands-on employment to guys coming out of jail," he said. "It also put good bread on the table for people."

Gefell and Frazier had been involved with St. Joseph's, which provides housing, meals and other services to homeless people. Gefell was looking to cut back on her catering work, and she and Frazier were looking for a way to help homeless people find work. They approached St. Joe's with an idea.

"Peg wanted to know how much we could take over," said Tim Sigrist, St. Joe's president. "We thought we could handle baking bread. But there's no use doing it just to have bread unless we were training people. Internships were the key."

They were also one of the biggest challenges. "We learned that folks living on the streets...often have addictions," said Gefell, who opened up her Savory Thyme kitchen for baking the bread. One worker subsequently ended up back in jail and using drugs again. The program now requires interns to be

in recovery. "It sets a standard for guys who want to be in the bakery," said Gefell.

It can be difficult to find people in recovery at St. Joe's. When asked how many men qualified for an internship, Kate Koval, who coordinated the bread program, answered honestly, "Not many." But there are a few. Robert Bonazza is one of them.

At first glance, it would seem that Bonazza's chances of getting clean and sober, let alone working, would be minimal. He never graduated high school, but he did graduate from smoking pot at 13 to abusing cocaine at 19. Bonazza said he has been arrested "several" times and did some jail time. He has never held a job, collecting Supplemental Security Income because of a learning disability. He finally sought help in kicking his addiction and now has been clean for almost two years.

He works 15 hours at the bakery, for which he's paid, but he's getting more than money out of it. "The bakery has really helped me keep my sobriety and increased my self-esteem," he said. "This feels good—to be responsible for a job." A Narcotics Anonymous tattoo on his left forearm tells him where he's been. "I did it to remind myself that I'm a drug addict," he said. "But I'm trying to better my life."

Bonazza is the bakery's second intern. According to Frazier, the first has already found full-time employment—something Bonazza will seek. The program also uses volunteers like Tammy Shanahan of Rochester. "I wanted to learn about baking bread," she said. She also learned something about people in the program. "My experience is that when people are ready to get job training and they get an opportunity, something just clicks."

Bread For All's ingredients are all organic, and most are bought locally. The group also donates loaves to shelters and soup kitchens.

The bread itself and the group's mission seem to be a successful combination. As subscriber Ann Sifuentes says, "It's not only a good cause—it's good bread."

For more information or to purchase a subscription, e-mail Rachael Morlock at st.joes.bakery@gmail.com or call the bakery at 278-7780.

Joseph Sorrentino is a Rochester-based writer and photographer.



Bread For All co-founder Paul Frazier (left), works with Intern Robert Bonazza. (Top right) Bonazza with co-founder Peg Gefell. (Right) Amy Hentschke (left) of Rochester, a subscriber, picks up her weekly allotment from bakery coordinator Rachael Morlock.



Rising trend?

There are now a few dozen community supported bakeries (CSBs) around the country and at least one other—Small World Bakery—in Rochester. Small World also trains workers but with the intent of getting them ready to open their own CSR. Small World is located at 972 Plymouth Ave.: 563-9018.

