



Fresh bread (above) covers the counter in preparation for the Bread Board sale set to follow the next day. The regularly scheduled event has become popular with friends and neighbors.

John Volkmann (right) kneads dough used to make jalapeno corn bread while looking out the window of the Falls City home he shares with Keith Zinn.



New Falls City bakery sure to deliver the goods

By Gail Oberst
The Itemizer-Observer

John Volkmann thumps a hot loaf of pumpkin walnut bread as it comes out of the wood-fired brick oven in his backyard above Falls City. A hollow thud emits from the top of the crust, releasing cinnamon-wheat goodness into the crisp winter air.

"Your kitchen oven just can't bake crust like that," shrugs Keith Zinn, who is working next to Volkmann, filling his basket with a dozen loaves, which he hauls back into his newly licensed kitchen.

For the past year or so, the pair have been trying out recipes and marketing techniques on friends and neighbors — with overwhelming success. The informal bakery has been so successful that the two are expanding their efforts.

They now have a domestic kitchen license which allows them to sell their artisan breads at farmers markets. The artisan baked goods, once available only to friends and neighbors, will now be for sale beginning April 4 at the Independence Farmers Market, which will be open every Saturday through October.

The two entrepreneurs are already thinking beyond farmers markets. They are renovating property at 404 N. Main St. in Falls City for a bakery and gardens with a wood-fired oven twice as big as the size of their patio oven, and are hoping to re-create for the public the tasty gatherings that are becoming legendary at the Victorian 1905 house when neighbors come to pick up their breads.

Kneading the dough for his next batch of bread, Zinn said they'll start building the new oven in July with an eye to opening public business in spring 2010. Meanwhile, breads will be available in Independence.

The timer goes off, and brings the two back to the here and now.

Zinn gives the dough a final pat, covers it in the fire-place room, grabs a board and heads out to the oven to rotate the baking bread. Sliding aside the oven door, the aromas of toast, walnuts and yeast escape as Zinn rearranges bread.

They have the capacity to bake 150 loaves in two days, not counting the scones.

John Volkmann, a Missouri native, and Keith Zinn, from West Virginia, met in Freestone, Calif., a tiny, tony

Our daily Bread

town in Northern California's wine country.

For five years there, Zinn honed his bakery skills at Wildflower Bread, a wood-fired artisan bakery that produced as many as 1,000 loaves a day, while Volkmann worked as a nurse in Santa Rosa. Volkmann continues to work as a nurse for Good Samaritan's Endoscopy Center in Corvallis, but is also an expert baker and chef who helps with every facet of the Bread Board.

The two saved their money to buy their own home and start a business. They looked for a place in Oregon with affordable land, workshop space and access to the raw materials they would need to cook, landscape, garden and build Adirondack chairs — another of Zinn's skills.

They fell in love with Falls City and moved here three years ago. Within a year, Volkmann was on the City Council. Today, he is council president.

The beginning of the bread is the wild yeast — the unique basis of all Bread Board sourdoughs. The men combined wild New England and Northern California sourdoughs to create a new yeast culture — no commercial yeasts are used for leavening.

The basic bread recipe also has no fats, eggs or baking powder. Breads are made of wheat or white flour, salt and sourdough starter, with variations of flavors added. From local growers and stores come fresh chopped apples, nuts, chunks of garlic, fresh herbs and spices, cheeses and other ingredients that turn the simple breads into artisan ware. More than 40 recipes include fougasse, ciabatta, jalapeno corn, pumpkin walnut, sticky buns, seed breads and scones, to name a few.

Although the men, the sourdough and location are unique, it is the wood-fired oven that creates a product unlike any other.

"You have to have a relationship with your oven," said Volkmann. "There are no hard and fast rules for baking. You just have to know your oven."

Their relationship with the oven began when it was built by Dale Larson, encased in 15,000 pounds of concrete and covered in perlite — volcanic rock famous for its insulation properties. The oven was installed, bricked in and then faced with decorative river rock collected from camping trips.

Last week, the men began building fires in the oven — stone cold after a two-week vacation — nearly five days before they intended to bake to warm the concrete and bricks. Early in the morning, before baking, they built up the fire inside the oven, let it burn down, raked out the coals, and mopped it out until it was clean.

By 9 a.m., the temperature had dropped to about 560 degrees — and the baking begins. The oven temperature will drop about 30 degrees or more every batch, so timing is important. The next day, the two will build another fire at night in preparation to bake again until their friends show up to pick up their bread.

To keep up on what's going on with the Bread Board, or to join their mailing list, visit the business' Web site, www.thebreadboard.net.



Keith Zinn (top) spreads butter, walnuts and cinnamon onto one of several types of dough prepared for the bread sale. Designs are carved into the top of each loaf of bread just prior to baking, giving each loaf a unique look (above). Volkmann and Zinn (left) remove loaves of fresh bread from the wood-fired oven.

Photos By Adam Korst

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Happy 90th Birthday!

Thelma M. Smith just celebrated her March 13th birthday at a party thrown for her by her family.

She is a Monmouth/Independence resident who moved here from Kansas in 1946 and has lived here ever since.

For the last two years she has resided at Farmington Square.

Congratulations! Best wishes for many more Happy Birthdays!

We love you, Grandma!