

Fall in love with the truly local and neighborly baking at Great Harvest Bread

By SUSAN MCFARLAND

Tribune Correspondent

Clent Sullivan spent many years as a CPA working for various companies before deciding to pack it in and follow in the footsteps of his German ancestors and become a baker. "My grandfather would tell me stories about the bakeries his father, grandfather and great grandfather had in Frankfurt, Germany. He was supposed to be a baker too, but decided to be an engineer instead. Now I've picked the chain back up," said Sullivan. He and his wife, Nikki, opened the Kingwood location of the Great Harvest Bread Company almost a year ago. In celebration of the upcoming First Anniversary, the bakery/cafe will offer daily specials during the first week of February and hourly give-aways and extra fun on Saturday, February 4.

The location, just east of 59 and north of Kingwood Drive on Royal Forest is well known to fans of the shop. "We are tucked in here a little bit off the beaten path. It's a destination location. There is actually quite a bit of traffic though. Lots of area residents come in, including people living in the senior citizen housing in the immediate area. They come in on their scooters," said Sullivan.

There are over 220 locations of Great Harvest Bread Company in the US, with just a few in the Houston area. The company is headquartered in Montana, where the grain used in the Great Harvest Bread is grown. "The whole concept of Great Harvest is slow food. Everything we do is from scratch and takes a lot of time. It takes us about five hours to make a loaf of bread," said Sullivan.

Sullivan and his team grind about 120 pounds of organic standards grown wheat berries into flour every other day on site. "We have a commercial mill right in the store, with two 20-inch granite stones in it. Each loaf of their signature Honey Whole Wheat bread weighs about two pounds, five ounces and most of that is flour," said Sullivan. He added that flour loses the majority of its nutritional value within four to five days after milling. "That's why we do the milling on site, to retain the vitamins and antioxidants. Bread has really gotten a bad rap, but whole grain bread has a lot of nutritional value."

Additionally, the bakery empties a 55-gallon drum of honey about every three weeks. "Honey sweetens our breads, activates the yeast and is a natural preservative as well," said Sullivan. He added, "our whole grain breads stay fresh 7 to 10 days, but we recommend the bread not be refrigerated because the honey crystallizes and dries it out faster. It can, however, be frozen, where it will keep for 2-3 months."

The bakery offers a revolving menu of different types of bread, depending on the day. "We have four core breads we make every day. We make our Honey Whole Wheat, with just five ingredients (flour, honey, yeast, salt and water), our Harvest White, Cinnamon Chip and Dakota bread, which is honey whole wheat bread with pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds and millet. The

seeds are toasted so it has a really nutty, hearty flavor that is great with almond butter or Nutella. We also make other breads like European sourdoughs, gluten free, jalapeño cheddar, cheddar garlic, and a high fiber bread with flax seeds and 3 kinds of dried fruit, and dessert breads with fillings rolled into the doughs. Sometimes we will do seasonal breads like chocolate breads for Valentines and Irish Soda Bread will coming up in March. We also make a low-carbohydrate bread upon request. We publish a seasonally updated bread schedule every four to eight weeks on our website," said Sullivan.

The shop offers a proprietary blend coffee made from locally roasted beans and a myriad of baked goods, like cookies, oat and fruit bars, and scones and savory biscuits. The cafe offers breakfast and lunch. "We have a breakfast panini that is very popular, it comes with your choice of bacon, sausage, ham, turkey or roast beef and different types of cheese. We have a lot of popular sandwiches and soups for lunch. We make our own herb spreads and sandwich sauces in house as well. They are really delicious," said Sullivan.

He noted the shop does some catering for local companies and is preparing to expand that part of their business.

Clent and Nikki met at Texas A&M many years ago. Nikki had just returned from an exchange student trip to Germany and Clent had just returned from a two-year church mission trip. Clent majored in economics and accounting and spent twenty years working in accounting for various companies including Baker Hughes, Superior Energy

Services, and United Rentals. The couple married and had five children. When the children were young, the family spent four years living in Venezuela while Sullivan worked for Baker Hughes. "It was an awesome experience. It had its challenges because we didn't have the comforts and security of the U.S., but the country is beautiful and the people are fantastic." The five Sullivan kids are now ages 11-22 and, like their parents, speak varying levels of Spanish. The family loves people and foods from many different cultures which adds to the friendly atmosphere of their bakery, especially when the kids join the team. They have been known to work on recipe production as well as customer service and clean up. "Our 11-year-old son, in particular, loves to work the front counter and sell bread," said Sullivan.

Sullivan said the shop incorporates his passion with goals the couple have had. "I've been a home bread baker for years, baking every Sunday. It's always been a passion of mine and I love doing it. So that in part inspired us. We also really wanted to become more involved in the community, provide jobs to local people and help support our family, and this really fit the bill. We fill a niche that nobody else really fills in Kingwood right now. We try to give to community as much as we can in many different ways. For example, we donate all of our two-day old bread to HAAM, Society of St. Stephen and Family Time Women's Shelter," said Sullivan.



OWNERS:
Nikki and Clent Sullivan



OPENED DOORS:
February 2016

FAVORITE QUOTE:
Be loose and have fun, bake phenomenal bread, run fast to help customers and give generously to others.