

Scrumptious breads, entertainment served up at Water House Foods

By Ryan Whisner

Water House Foods café and bakehouse in Lake Mills is a dream come true for owners Rae and Shawn Rediske.

"We craft our foods with care, love and passion and we crave sharing them," Shawn said.

Artisan breads, croissants, scones, cookies, muffins, sandwiches and soups are made healthier at the café and bakehouse with local organic ingredients.

Open since December 2008 in downtown Lake Mills, Water House Foods has quickly become an integral part of the community where dreams come alive.

More than just preparing and serving scrumptious breads and yummy food, Water House Foods also is a gathering place for visitors and residents of the *Four Lakes Area* to relax, play an instrument, sing a song, relate a story, share art, and even act a part all in a safe and accepting place.

The name of the café and bakehouse is derived from all the water in Shawn and Rae's lives prior to opening.

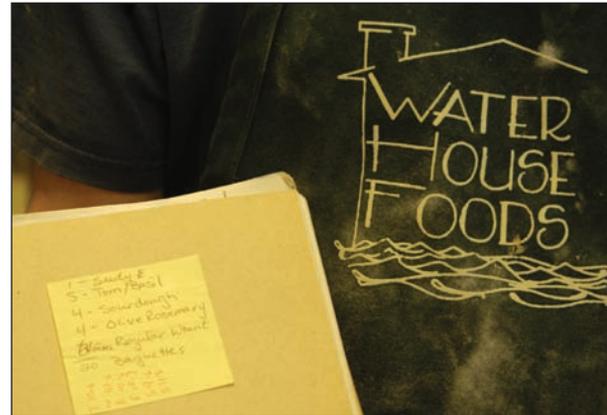
"There is water everywhere in our lives, except at the store," Rae said, noting that ironically, Water House Foods is one of the only buildings in town that doesn't have water in the basement.

Moving to Lake Mills in 2006, the couple found a home a block away from Rock Lake. Due to the massive amounts of rainfall in August 2007, water pooled in the basement. Much to their amazement, the problems continued into the winter due to ice dams which formed, causing a leak in the roof.

"Truly the house is either blessed or cursed with water spirits," Rae quipped.

At the time, Shawn was working at a manufacturing facility in Delavan that makes pumps that move water.

"Between our house and his job, we



Ryan Whisner and Water House Foods photos

SUCCESSFUL INGREDIENTS

— Water House Foods in Lake Mills does more than just offer great breads and other delectables. It also serves as a gathering place for residents of and visitors to the *Four Lakes Area*. Pictured here, clockwise from top: mouth-watering garlic bread; the original first order ever for Water House Foods saved in the shop's copy of "Bread Alone"; a packed open mic performance at the café; and co-owner Shawn Rediske preparing bread dough.

figured Water House Foods was a good name," Rae said.

Opening the café and bakehouse started with a simple gift of a loaf of bread to a friend.

Coming out of college Shawn took a job with Ford Motor Company which took him to Detroit.

"I didn't know how to cook and I knew I was going to have to," he said. At the time, he and Rae were maintaining a long-distance relationship. She was a vegetarian.

Shawn purchased the book "Vegetar-

ian Cooking for Everyone" by Deborah Madison.

He started making the bread recipes because he was bored on Sundays when he was not returning to Wisconsin to see Rae. Shawn said he has no formal training.

Breads he was making consistently did not turn out well so he gave up.

Shawn's mother got him "Bread Alone" by Daniel Leader for Christmas one year.

"All of a sudden the breads I was making didn't taste like Wonder Bread



Water House Foods photos

BAKEHOUSE AND CAFE — Baked goods are all the rage at Water House Foods. Above left are just a small selection of cookies offered at the bakehouse. The café, located on East

Lake Street in downtown Lake Mills, has become a gathering place for patrons to dine, of course, but also to simply relax, listen to live music or share artwork. The interior is shown above.

any more, they were really good," Shawn said, noting that the book reinvigorated his interest in bread-making.

"Baking is very different, we found, than cooking," Shawn said, noting that cooking is very extemporaneous. He said the good cooks do everything by taste and intuition.

Shawn, a process engineer by training, explained that baking is more precise and process focused.

"If you forget to put the salt in a loaf of bread, you're done," he said. "Once it's baked, it's baked. There is still some intuition and still touch but it is a lot more structured."

Originally, bread making was only a hobby.

For more than a decade, Shawn has been baking bread, giving it away to relatives and friends for holidays and other occasions.

A couple of years ago, he gave a loaf to a friend from France, who told him it

was the best bread he had ever tasted in the United States. He encouraged Shawn to sell it.

Samples of the bread were taken to the Brick Street Market in Delavan where the owner, Laura Jacobs-Welch agreed to sell it.

Rae and Shawn went on vacation and upon returning, Jacobs-Welch had an order for them. Written on a sticky note, that original order remains in the front cover of Shawn's copy of "Bread Alone" as a reminder of how they got started.

From there, the couple formed Water House Foods and started participating in the local Farmers Market.

Once established, they had to locate a certified kitchen to bake their bread. Eventually, they found the Rock Lake Activity Center in Lake Mills.

From the early stages, Shawn's efforts have expanded from breads to scones, muffins, croissants, kringles,

sweet breads and cookies.

"We built from breads the entire line of products we have," Rae said.

Initially the product was all sold wholesale.

"It was getting big enough that we needed a full-fledged location to sell from," she said. A partnership with Windsor Breads led to the opening of the café and bakehouse in downtown Lake Mills.

"This is just something we decided to do," Shawn said.

In August 2009 he left his engineering job and has been baking and cooking full-time.

"Every time we think, 'what do we do now?' something drops out of the sky and we go, 'oh, we'll do that,'" Shawn said.

For example, when the partnership with Windsor Breads was dissolved, Water House Foods started making more of their own products other than

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just breads.

From that point, it advanced to sandwiches and soups. This summer, salads are slated to be added to the growing menu and the couple are talking about adding more breakfast items.

"Our customers have been great in guiding us toward what we want to do," Shawn said. "One of our goals is to be changing so frequently that even our regulars come in have the experience of 'oh, I didn't know you were doing that.'"

With Shawn providing much of the vision and effort on the food side, it was Rae's dream to have a café that also serves as a music venue with a comfortable atmosphere.

"The café is important but I like to describe it as just being a front," Shawn said. "What we're really interested in doing is helping people find those things that they really want to do and then help them make their dreams come true."

The concept developed into open mic nights at the café.

For Shawn, his proudest moment, involved two middle school girls who participated at an open mic night. The pair started playing Bob Dylan's "Knockin on Heaven's Door," much to the surprise and awe of the crowd.

The duo were asked to return to headline an open mic night a couple months later. In between, the pair formed a band, developed a website and went from being two young students performing at a local café to being a band.

"Seeing that creative juice flowing was just gratifying," he said. "That is the kind of stuff we want to do."

To further engage with the community, Water House Foods also hosts "Fundraiser Tuesdays." The events serve as fundraisers for organizations or groups looking to raise money.

The café and bakehouse provides a location for contributions and 20 percent off store sales that day are offered to the charity.

Shawn said the first event of 2010 was scheduled in January just before the earthquake in Haiti. Upon hearing of the earthquake, the pair wanted to raise money for Haiti relief. More than \$750 was raised for the American Red Cross.

Water House Foods, located at 110 East Lake St. in Lake Mills, is open 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mondays, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays; and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

For food or fun, stop at the café today. ❖



Water House Foods photo

STICKY FINGERS — Water House Foods offers baking classes for both novice and experienced bakers.

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