

Foothills Milling Company Bakery is dream realized

By Sherri Gardner Howell

Whitney and Bart Vaughan are a great couple. She's sweet, and he's spicy. She fills Foothills Milling Company Bakery with the cinnamon scent of Snickerdoodles and yeasty bouquet of sour dough bread while he punctuates the air with the aroma of zesty sausage and briny corned beef.

Together they are making their almost 15-year-old dream a topic of county conversation and a must-go place for lunch.

"It was always our plan – a dream, I guess," says Whitney, the baker and pastry chef of the husband/wife duo. "My mom is a great baker, and baking is the part I love the most. In the restaurant business, however, you do everything. Bart and I both have always planned, prepped, cooked and also worked the line at the restaurant because that's just what you do."

The restaurant is Foothills Milling Company, a high-end small restaurant with a reputation for incredible food, friendliness and good service in downtown Maryville. It is owned by Bart and his brother, Tommy, who puts in his hours in the front of the house. The family-owned establishment started with a restaurant for just over 30 in Wears Valley, then moved to Maryville and doubled in size in 2001. In those early days in Wears Valley, Bart and Whitney lived in an apartment above the restaurant.

The new casual, counter-service restaurant at Five Points on East Broadway features beautifully crafted wood and metal tables that Bart built for lunchroom dining, a case for customers to choose chips, drinks, desserts, side dishes, and an order and pay counter with a backdrop of the bakery's fresh breads.

The magic all happens in the space behind that customer-service and dining area. Whitney's bakery is on one side and Bart's sandwich prep and cook area on the other. Further in the back is a butcher-type shop where Bart happily grinds meats, packs beef in brine, measures spices and churns cream to make cheese. Whitney and her bakers turn their attention to the day's offerings of homemade breads, then move on to cookies, banana puddings, cheesecakes and other desserts to go with the lunch choices. Bart makes the meats for the sandwiches – from corned beef, which can take up to 20 days to complete, to sausage, bologna and smoked pork.



Bart Vaughan checks his house-made sausages at Foothills Milling Company Bakery.



Whitney Vaughan, in the pastry kitchen at Foothills Milling Company Bakery



The Bologna and Truffle Cheese sandwich has Foothills house-made hickory-smoked bologna, house-made black truffle American cheese, crispy fried onions and Calabrian chiles on fresh-baked pain de mie bun.

“We want to make everything that it makes sense to make,” says Bart, “anything that we can make better. There’s no need, for example, to make bacon because we can buy the best there is just down the road.”

Bart is even making his own cheese. “He wants to make sure he has a cheese with a good, rich flavor that will still melt well,” explains Whitney, as Bart checks his homemade sausages in the steamer.

There are four who cook with them – Laura Trent, Robbie Hunter, Kevin LeBlanc and Andrew Loeschner -- plus a counter staff. Bart and Whitney still have responsibilities at the main restaurant, so the days are long for them.

“We are still working on many things as we figure out what people want on the menu,” says Whitney, “but we are happy with the casual feel of the bakery. I like getting to interact a little with the customers, to see them as they look at the bakery case and see the desserts and breads. Good food makes people happy, and that’s what we want to do.”

Foothills Milling Company Bakery, 1420 E. Broadway Ave., is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays with lunch served from 10:45 a.m. to 3 p.m.