



# Tradewinds Bakery

AARON AND SARAH ROMEL ARE GIVING NEW LIFE TO A LEGACY BUSINESS IN DOWNTOWN ROGERS CITY

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Photos and Story by Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

I went to show somebody at work something on Facebook, and I just happened to see that the Tradewinds Bakery was for sale. I grew up in Rogers City, and Tradewinds was a staple; you could always go there for a great donut. So, when I went home, I said to my wife, Sarah, 'Hey, do you want to buy a bakery?'

She laughed at me at first, but then she said, 'You're serious?'

At the time, she was working at a dental office in Cheboygan, losing three hours of her day driving. I knew she had a passion for baking and it was something that if she set her mind to it, it would be successful.

We had a really long talk about how we would have to invest everything, risking our entire

livelihood, to make it work. She was making good money at the dentist's office, had job security, and we had two small kids. We knew that if we were going to do this, it couldn't be halfway.

We talked with friends and family, and then we met with John, who had owned Tradewinds since 1989. He didn't want to just sell it to anybody. He was looking for the right person to keep the Tradewinds legacy going. He put his whole life into it, and he wanted somebody who was going to do the same.

And we ended up being the right people.

Thankfully and gratefully, he was willing to stay on for the whole first month when we took over to show me all of his

recipes and how to make donuts. I had never made a donut before in my life! He taught me how to make bread, and then he showed me how to keep production going on such a large scale, because home baking is completely different from baking for an entire town.

You have to make sure everything stays the same. You need the same consistency and quality customers have had and are expecting. There was a lot to take on and it took a lot of time, but after three weeks, he said that I had it down and that I didn't need him anymore. That was such a validation for me personally to hear that from him.

Since then, it's been overwhelming, knowing that there are people who have come into that bakery now on a regular basis just because they want to support us. That's a huge thing. That's something that you can really hang your hat on about how the people are in our community.

The response has been amazing. I love this town. I'm not from here originally, so it was a lot to not only learn how to run the business but to start meeting all of the people from this community. Now I recognize a majority of our customers on a daily basis because they come in either weekly or a few times a week. They continue to complement our products and everything that we add to the menu when we try out new things.

I'm most proud of my wife. It's all on the back of her hard work and building a good team. I have a lot of input on what goes on, but I don't have nearly as much impact on the



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team there on a day-to-day basis that she does. I'm proud of not just her work of getting the products out there, but also in managing the team and bringing such a great customer service aspect to our community.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that this would be a possibility! With my previous job, driving back and forth was very hard for me because I barely got to see our kids. Now I get to see them more frequently. Even when we first bought the bakery and I was here literally all day, Aaron would pick them up and bring them in and make sure that they got to spend time with me. Now that we have the staff built up and we have such a great culture, and a great community of workers, customers and people in general, I have a lot more freedom with what I'm able to do with my family. Then I also get to do things to give back to the community. I'm just so proud of all of that we've been able to do.

Being an energizing aspect for the community has been neat and that road goes both ways. Buying the bakery was a huge investment, but to see the community give that investment back, not just by being customers, but also from learning from other business owners who have been doing it for years, has been amazing. We're very proud of Rogers City. There is nothing really quite like Rogers City; you don't see anything like it anywhere else in Michigan, and most of that comes down to the people in the community.

- Aaron and Sarah Romel,  
Tradewinds Bakery, Rogers City



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