

# Tampa Bay Times

## Luscious pastries, healthy lunches draw the hungry to new Safety Harbor bakery

By Elaine Markowitz, Times Correspondent

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**SAFETY HARBOR** — Last October, Jim and Elizabeth Nelson opened their dream shop, a bakery and café offering European-style gourmet pastries. On the door of the shop in Northwood Commons are the enticing words, "Elizabeth's Gourmet Delights."

Though the bakery has been open less than a year, it has a real following. The Nelsons are busy by 6 a.m. each day preparing for their 7 a.m. opening.

"Before we open the doors, the case is full," said Elizabeth, the primary baker and chef, "and we bake all day to keep replenishing our supply."

Her husband, who calls the bakery his retirement job after years in commercial air conditioning, handles all the finances, billing and marketing. He exudes pride in his wife's culinary skills.

"All our baked goods are made here from scratch," he said. "We use no additives or preservatives and only use fresh vegetables and squeeze fresh lemons."

It's a labor of love for Elizabeth, who said she has baked all her life and always wanted to bake professionally. A native of the Republic of Cameroon in Africa, Nelson spent years in Montreal before landing in Tampa 16 years ago for a job as professional fundraiser for the University of South Florida and then the F. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center.

The French influence of French-speaking Cameroon and Montreal has carried over into her baking. The glass cases brim with French and European-inspired favorites: mounds of peanut butter mousse topped with rich



chocolate ganache, glazed French apple tarts, creamy fruit tarts topped with slices of kiwis and strawberries, and fresh scones.

The shelves behind the cases are crammed with freshly made breads. French baguettes, soft brioche and croissants mingle their fragrant, crusty scents with loaves of Kalamata olive, roasted garlic and sourdough breads.

The Clearwater couple, who met at a wine tasting in Tampa and married in 2007, didn't expect to become entrepreneurs. In 2011, while living in Wesley Chapel, they strolled around the Wiregrass open air mall on New Year's Day and saw a farmer's market. Elizabeth said she was stunned.

"How can we have this in our back yard and not be part of it?" she said of the market.

The pair signed on immediately. They rented commercial bakery space in Tampa and a U-Haul van to carry the goods to market. A portable business was born. "We baked all night long and drove straight to the market in the morning," Elizabeth said.

Jim joined his wife in enthusiastically embracing the new enterprise.

"People got their bread while it was still warm," he said. "We got a lot of customers and developed a following."

The success at Wiregrass prompted the Nelsons to try other markets, including one in Hyde Park Village and another in Seminole Heights. Visitors took to their baked goods and sales went up.

Baking became a serious business for the Nelsons.

"You have to have a passion for this," Elizabeth said. "It is what keeps you going."

That passion took the couple on tasting trips to bakeries on both coasts of Florida. They traveled to Los Angeles, where Elizabeth's adult daughter lives, and explored bakeries in Southern California. The idea of owning their own bakery soon became the couple's goal.

Last October, a friend called to tell them of a cake shop going out of business in the Northwood Commons strip center on the southeast corner of McMullen-Booth and Enterprise roads. They signed a lease, purchasing their own equipment and a handful of tables and chairs for the small customer area. The Nelsons moved to Clearwater to be near the bakery.

Just eight months later the place is booming.

"Some people come in every day for at least one meal," Elizabeth said, "and sometimes later in the day for coffee and dessert."

Along with the meticulously prepared bakery items, the bakery offers breakfasts and lunches six days a week.

The offerings often feature a touch of the exotic. A popular breakfast sandwich includes soft scrambled eggs, bacon, sharp cheddar and peppery green arugula, all packed into a homemade croissant. Luncheon quiches change daily, but might include one with pancetta and leeks, or one with feta cheese, olives, spinach and sun-dried tomatoes. Soups and salads are served as well.

The bakery's reputation is growing mostly by word of mouth. A pastry chef and several other kitchen assistants have recently come onboard. The couple seems geared up for the long haul.

"This is our retirement," said Elizabeth, adding that the business is still too young to take time off from it.

"This is a warm, accepting community," said Jim. "We give them the credit for our success."

>>Fast facts

Hot and fresh

Elizabeth's Gourmet Delights is in Northwood Commons at 2454 N McMullen-Booth Road in Safety Harbor. Call (727) 712-2222 for information. The bakery is closed on Monday, but open Tuesday through Saturday from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. and on Sundays from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. A cafe-style breakfast is served Tuesday through Saturday from 7 a.m. until 11 a.m. and Sunday from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. Lunch is served Tuesday through Sunday from 11:30 a.m. until 2 p.m.

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