The Maui News

Bakery holds pandemic-delayed blessing for new owners

Maui Bread Company Store and Bake Shop offers local delicacies, German bread in Kihei



Maui Bread Company owners Christine and Steve Lange present a pretzel lei to Maui Chamber of Commerce President Pamela Tumpap during Friday morning's blessing ceremony for the company's store and bake shop at Dolphin Plaza in Kihei. The German couple with a passion for artisan breads bought the business just months before the pandemic started. They said after a long journey and delays due to worldwide circumstances, they were pleased to have the blessing. The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photos

KIHEI – Steve and Christine Lange say many coincidences paved the way for them to become the owners of the Maui Bread Company Store and Bake Shop in Kihei.

Christine Lange fell in love with Hawaii while visiting the islands with a friend in 2018 and 2019. When people heard she was from Germany, many asked, *"Where is your German bread?"* Recognizing a need, she returned home and jokingly told her husband they should open a German bakery in the islands. Something clicked, however, for Steve

Lange began researching the idea. With his background in the food industry, he began to see potential.

The couple spent six weeks in the fall of 2019 vacationing in Hawaii and visiting nearly every bakery on four islands. Their search for what they consider to be true German artisan breads came up empty. Crunching the numbers, the idea of opening a bakery in the 50th state was looking even better on paper. They just needed to find the right community to join.

They say the biggest coincidence happened on Maui when, by chance, they booked a rental unit owned by the owners of the Fusion Gourmet Bread Shop. Not long after, on Dec. 13, 2019, the Langes signed papers to buy the bakery located at Dolphin Plaza. On Jan. 1, 2020, they became owners of the renamed Maui Bread Company.

Steve Lange said the bakery's former owners, Dion Abbott and Iris Lin, had done such a good job building a product line and customer base they did not want to abandon the business' traditions, just add to them. The bakery now boasts both a master German baker and master Hawaiian baker. Its menu ranges from lilikoi buns and Hawaiian sweet bread to round loafs of crusty traditional German rye and big pretzels fresh from the oven.



Maui Bread Company Store and Bake Shop staffer Erika Kolist reaches for a loaf of German artisan bread Saturday morning. The specialties of bread are named for the owners' children, grandchildren and for friends, like a rye called Norbert Busch.

Whether it was coincidence, or a cruel twist of fate, COVID-19 changed the world in their third month of business. The grandparents of five found their bake shop closed and Maui's tourism-based economy grounded. Unfortunately, they were still working their way through clerical and bureaucratic hurdles that would have helped them better weather the storm. Consulates closed due to the pandemic and their request for an investor visa was placed on hold until September. Without a Social Security number, they were not eligible for personal protective equipment assistance like other businesses.

The bake shop was closed from March to October, while the bakery serviced a reduced number of commercial clients.

"That was a difficult time, but it is something we have been going through," Steve Lange said. *"We are very happy the island has reopened and business is starting again. As it is a worldwide issue, we just need to hang in there and have the patience we have to have."*

Christine Lange said she refused to let the pandemic get her down.

"We were very busy before the pandemic," she said. *"I decided to be positive. We think positive and keep moving forward."*



Master Hawaiian Baker Chayce Cardenas carries a pan of guava buns to the bake shop Friday.

The owners said the bake shop has seen a steady increase in foot traffic since reopening. Although tourists are a big part of their customer base, Christine said there are a number of expats who come in to get a taste of home.

"I'm surprised by how many people with German roots there are on this island," she said.

To create their line of artisan German breads, the Langes hired Master German Baker Marina Schablack and brought her to Maui from Germany. They also added a special German-made oven and other specialty equipment to the bakery. Schablack said the key to baking tasty traditional bread is, *"having the right ingredients."*

Continuing the bakery's tradition of Hawaiian-Asian fusion baked goods is Master Hawaiian Baker Chayce Cardenas, who is a 2018 graduate of the University of Hawaii Maui College Culinary Arts Program.

The bake shop is open 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. five days a week, closed Wednesday and Thursday. The Langes said they hope to be open seven days a week soon.

Maui Bread Company held a blessing ceremony Friday morning to make its opening official. The blessing was conducted by Kahu Laki Kaahumanu.

* Matthew Thayer can be reached at thayer@maui.net.

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