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Grains to star at eatery in Skowhegan mill

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

SKOWHEGAN — Grain guru Amber Lambke is at it again. Not content to rest on the burgeoning cereal scene she helped create in Skowhegan, the president of Maine Grains and executive director of the Maine Grain Alliance recently pulled back the curtain on her next big act.

Maine Grains at the Somerset Grist Mill will open a restaurant this summer featuring farm-to-table fare, including polenta, biscuits and bread made with homegrown ingredients milled a roll's throw away. The new, year-round concept will take over the renovated garage last home to the Pickup Cafe and community supported agriculture, or CSA, program located in the former county jail on Court Street.

"The cafe will reopen early this summer under the management of Maine Grains, establishing itself as showcase restaurant for Maine Grain products, including fresh-baked items, grab-and-go items, wood-fired pizza

and more," she said.

The multifarm CSA that used the space for years ran out of room and has moved to Grassland Organic Farm in Skowhegan, Lambke explained on a tour last week of the complex, where local grains are manufactured.

"The restaurant is now tucked into Maine Grains, so we can demonstrate the use of the grains," Lambke said.

Research and development on value-add products also will take place in the commercial kitchen.

A soon to be installed wood-fired oven will crank out pizza, and a dry goods retail shop will carry the mill's popular rolled oats, cookbooks and utensils in a renovated office. In an open-air courtyard, where inmates used to recreate, another wood-burning oven will ignite for events and special occasions.

"It's an evolution," Lambke said. "The timeline has sped up, but the vision of the full development of the building has always included maximizing the utilization of space in ways that complement the grain mill."

In addition to the new grain-focused restaurant, which has yet to be named, a cheese cave and on-site brewery also are in development.

As part of a multipronged plan for the space, cheesemaker Amy Rowbottom of Crooked Face Creamery in Norridgewock is researching a cheese-aging facility in the basement, and neighbors Bigelow Brewing Co. are partnering with Lambke to open a small brewery here. The goal is to turn a storage space adjacent to the cafe into a tasting room.

"The transition is an opportunity to tie the producers in this area that are using grains or whose work complements what we are doing here at the mill to showcase the agricultural economy that is coming to thrive in Somerset County," Lambke said.

Rowbottom said her research has only just begun, but she received backing this week from the Maine Cheese Guild, which has pledged to help her define a viable business model.

"It seems like a natural fit because there is so much going on in the food hub," Rowbottom, 32,



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Amber Lambke, founder and director of Maine Grains, is beginning an approximately two-year restructuring and renovation project, which will include a new farm-to-table cafe, local breweries, a retail store, cheese cave, farmers market and, of course, the existing grain mill.

said. She wants to age her own gouda and share the granite-lined, 30-foot high vaulted brick basement with nearby cheese startups.

"It's a very big space. I'm a small-batch cheese maker," Row-

bottom said. "The resources needed would be lengthy."

As Bigelow, located in a barn a few miles away, prepares to graduate from a three-barrel system to 15 barrels in June, the

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In cooking and in life, persistence matters

In Boston's Copley Square, a bronze public art installation recently caught my eye. It was the "Tortoise and Hare" created by artist Nancy Schon (she also is the artist behind the "Make Way for Ducklings" installation in the Boston Public Garden), themed after Aesop's fable and dedicated to Boston Marathon runners. Installed on May 19, 1993, it has been there for more than two decades.

Sponsored by Friends of Copley Square, the installation is a permanent tribute to the runners

from around the world who've run the marathon. It's an ode to hard work, to pushing through difficulties and to not taking things for granted. It's for runners like Michael Westphal, a 58-year-old carpenter from Great Cranberry Island with Parkinson's

disease, who finished the marathon on Monday in 3 hours, 38 minutes and 59 seconds.

On her website, Schon writes, "Some of the marathon runners I know run just to finish, they don't expect to win, they are challenged and want to have that wonderful sense of accomplishment. Persistence pays off. Slow and steady wins the race."

Westphal told BDN reporter Ernie Clark that he took medication for Parkinson's during the race but didn't notice any symptoms of the disease until the final 3 or 4 miles of the race.

"I began to feel a little weak then, but I don't know if that was the heat or the medication," Westphal told Clark. "A lot of people didn't finish, and I ended up walking a few times because I felt like I was falling forward. As I would attempt to regain my composure, I would walk for 20 seconds at a time up some of the hills, and that helped."

That sounds like exactly the kind of perseverance Schon had in mind.

Perseverance isn't just for marathons though. It's a key ingredient to a successful life. It's what sets apart top inventors such as Thomas Edison from those who let failure become a roadblock. It's a trait shared by J.K. Rowling, whose book proposal for the first Harry Potter book was rejected by 12 major publishers before being accepted by a small publisher. Likewise, Stephen King's first book, "Carrie," was repeatedly rejected before an editor scooped it up. And it fueled Steve Jobs, who famously was fired from Apple, the company he co-founded and later returned to.

Perseverance is an admirable trait, and one I've tried to instill in my kids. When we study for their spelling tests and they get a

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Fans of The Rib Truck know when the pink pig is in town they had best hurry before all the barbecue ribs, pulled pork and baked beans are sold out.

Ribs on wheels

Barbecue food truck could be headed your way

BY JULIA BAYLY
BDN STAFF

John and Mary Freeman sure know how to draw a crowd.

All they have to do is simply show up with the Rib Truck, and the hungry masses are not far behind. For the last 20 years, the Westmanland couple have traveled from one end of Aroostook County to the other selling barbecue ribs, chicken, pulled pork, baked beans and their newest creation, "the pork parfait."

Sort of rib-nomads, the couple goes from town to town in a modified van complete with open-pit barbecue cooker, warming oven and vats of their secret barbecue sauce on tap. They adhere to no real schedule and rely on social media posts and word of mouth to alert their fans when they will be in town.

That and the aroma. "I could smell this all the way over on my porch," one customer said as he stood in line Friday in Fort Kent. "I came right over to get some."

Friday was John and Mary Freeman's opening day for the post-winter season in Fort Kent, and it did not take long for barbecue aficionados to start lining up.

"My wife told me to make sure and stop to make sure we have Rib Truck when I get home," John Nadeau of Fort Kent said as he waited to place his order. "I don't want to know what would happen if I came home empty-handed."

As John Freeman kept a close watch on the barbecuing ribs, turning racks and moving them from grill to warming area, a constant stream of traffic slowed and stopped next to his van at the Sears parking lot.

"Think of this as aroma therapy," he joked as smoke from the



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Ribs, pulled pork and baked beans from The Rib Truck.

fire wafted over waiting customers. "I do love the ribs," Nadeau said. "But it's the parfait that my wife always gets."

A concoction for the true barbecue lover, Freeman's pork parfait is layers of bacon-baked beans and tender pulled pork smothered in the Rib Truck's signature sauce.

"Parfait is a French word for perfect, and the pork parfait is the perfect combination of pork and beans," he said. "It's extremely popular, and we sell hundreds of them every week."

For those who want to attempt their own Rib Truck creations at home, the Freemans have bottled their sauce for sale.

The couple routinely sells out of everything by early afternoon, and faithful customers know to show up early for the best selection. They're are often in Presque Isle twice per

week, at Thursdays on Sweden Street in Caribou and up in the St. John Valley once per week.

"I just post where and when we will be somewhere on Facebook," Mary Freeman said as she covered a rack of ribs in sauce. "That's all we need to do, and people just spread the word."

Ardent supporters of Aroostook County community events, the couple has bundled up and braved sub-zero temperatures to set up at the Can-Am Crown Sled Dog Races and worked in the heat over their fire pit at summer fairs and festivals around the area.

And people just keep coming back for more.

"We have a good product, and certainly the response from our customers has been exceptional," Freeman said. "Our flavors are really tough to beat."

A recipe to convert parsnip doubters

If you grow parsnips, then you know this is the best time to dig them up and enjoy them. Overwintering in the ground turns parsnips into candy. Still, there are some who look askance at them, and it occurs to me that perhaps this combination with carrots might make a parsnip lover out of the doubters. I don't know anyone who doesn't like carrots, though surely there must be some who wrinkle their noses and avert their gaze in the presence of a carrot.

This idea for serving these two root vegetables came from my island neighbor Linda Gillies, who brought the dish to a potluck. Her version was very smooth, downright creamy, sweet and lovely.

At our house, we like a little texture, so I mashed them vigorously with a potato masher and hit it only briefly with a stick blender. Have I mentioned how much I love that stick blender? You can puree even hot soup with it, beat eggs and flour together for crepes and whip lumps out of anything. It is a wonderful tool and easier to wash than a stand blender.

You can tip the proportions of the carrots and parsnips any way you like. I chose equal quantities and served four with a pound and a half of vegetables. Some add snipped chives; some like a little ginger added.

P.S. We have discovered who Nancy is of Brownie Schrupp's Nancy's Pork Chops and Apples, and several of you contacted me with precious Brownie memories. Next week I will share these with you and dig out another recipe from her cookbook for you to try.

Send queries or answers to Sandy Oliver, 1061 Main Road, Islesboro 04848. Email sandyoiver47@gmail.com. For recipes, tell us where they came from, list ingredients, specify number of servings and do not abbreviate measurements. Include name, address and daytime phone number. And make sure to check out Sandy's blog at tastebuds.bangordailynews.com.

Carrot and Parsnip Puree

Servings vary

Carrots
Parsnips
Butter and/or olive oil
Salt and pepper

Peel and chop the vegetables. Put them in a pan and barely cover with water. Boil the vegetables together until very tender. Mash or puree to your preferred texture. Add butter and/or olive oil to taste. Season to taste with salt and pepper.



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