

# New restaurant to be a ‘no-tipping zone’

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — When grab-and-go cafe Baristas and Bites opens in the Old Port in mid-October, customers will notice a new item on their bill: a cost-of-living surcharge.

“This is risky and different,” said Amy Alward, owner of Love Kupcakes Inc., who will open her new establishment serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, with the goal of paying full-time employees \$15 per hour.

By offering reasonably priced rotisserie chicken meals and discounts through a loyalty program, Alward expects high-volume sales to reduce the markup on goods like organic produce that gets passed onto customers. She intends to tack on an 11.2 percent charge, based on the bill’s total, to pay employees a living wage.

“The dynamic that we are working on is bringing equitable pay from the kitchen, into the front of the house and visa versa, which means that we are a no-tipping zone,” said Alward, who is

also a financial adviser and works in insurance.

She plans to offer employees a retirement package, paid time off and health insurance — sweeteners restaurant gigs can often lack. “We’re hoping our loyal patrons will understand that it’s expensive to be in Portland, to live in Portland, but we need and want to be here,” said Alward, who says she has sunk seven figures into the rebrand of her cupcake business and the new concept she is building at 469 Fore St.

“I have my fingers crossed. I

don’t know if it’s going to work.”

Baristas and Bites, which includes Love Kupcakes, will open just weeks before Mainers go to the polls on Nov. 8 to vote on Question 4, deciding whether to raise the minimum wage to \$12 per hour by 2020. The referendum includes a section on phasing out a tip credit.

“What the restaurant industry is facing statewide, if the referendum passes, is a restructuring of entire pay,” Julie Rabinowitz, a spokesperson for the Maine Department of Labor, said. Paying \$15 per hour and

not using the tip credit “It could give her a cutting edge in the labor market, because it’s a tight labor market. In this market, employers need to pay a competitive wage.”

Restaurateurs in Maine and across the country recently have struggled to find kitchen help. But Baristas and Bites has hired 20 employees and has a waiting list.

“I’m getting some good talent,” said Alward, who has worked in the restaurant business for 20 years in New Hampshire and Florida. She plans to mentor and

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LINDA COAN O’KRESIK | BDN  
Lee-Russel Dunn is the baker at Fork & Spoon in Bangor. He makes all of the pastries and breads fresh each morning. Dunn sprinkles flour over dough while making ciabatta bread on Friday morning.

## Switching up the recipe

Bangor’s Fork & Spoon goes in new direction

BY EMILY BURNHAM  
BDN STAFF

The summer of 2016 was full of big changes for Hampden chef Elisabeth Dean.

In May, she took over ownership of downtown Bangor eatery Fork & Spoon from former owner Chris Roberts. Shortly after that, she began revamping the menu. Originally the menu was exclusively vegan and gluten-free, but Dean wanted to expand the offerings and began introducing traditional baked goods, dairy products and even meat. Later in the summer, she began a total overhaul of the interior, from seating arrange-

ments to kitchen setup to wall art. It’s only now, in September, that Dean is starting to feel like things are a little less in flux.

For Dean, 49, the dream of owning a restaurant has always been in the back of her mind.

“People always told me, ‘You should open a restaurant!’ But it’s so scary to do that. You never know if it’ll actually work,” said Dean. “It’s been a long time coming.”

Before she got into the food world, Dean was a stay-at-home mom of two. Cooking had been her passion for as long as she can remember.

“I grew up in Sunnyside, California, near San Francisco, in

the 1980s. There was food everywhere. It was the start of California cuisine — fusion-type stuff, lots of healthy food and different influences,” said Dean. “I’ve always loved that. I’ve always loved to cook.”

After living all over the country, she settled in Maine, first in Lincoln and then in Hampden, where she’s lived since 2004. As her kids entered high school, she felt the urge to try something new, and enrolled in Eastern Maine Community College’s culinary arts program. As part of her degree, she took on externships — first in 2014 at Primo, chef Melissa Kelly’s nationally acclaimed farm-to-table restau-

rant in Rockland, and then in 2015 at Erin French’s The Lost Kitchen, the locavore dining destination in Freedom, and at Bar Harbor Catering Company with chef Mandy Fountaine.

“I learned so, so much from them,” said Dean, who also operates Basil Creek Catering. “To work with such amazing female chefs was totally life-changing.”

A few months after completing her externships, Dean heard that Chris Roberts was putting Fork & Spoon — formerly known as The Juice Cellar — up for sale. She decided to make an offer on the business, and Roberts accepted.

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## Can this Spicy Tomato Soup for winter eating

This rich, deeply flavorful tomato soup will taste so good next winter accompanied by a grilled cheese sandwich, or not, that you’ll feel like planting an acre of tomatoes. Well, I exaggerate, but only a little. This soup is a pretty good reason to stick a few more plants in the ground.

Tomatoes are so darn useful that I almost never have enough for all the fresh eating that we like in good old BLTs, salad, fresh salsa, gazpacho, as well as canned sauce, stewed tomatoes and chili sauce.

So now this soup recipe comes from Margaret Webb in Belfast to add to the preserves shelf. The original recipe calls for 14 quarts of tomatoes; I’d be hard-pressed to have that many all at one time even in a good tomato year. Maybe that isn’t your problem, in which case, bless you. I had to try this recipe out with a fraction of the tomatoes.



SANDY OLIVER  
TASTE BUDS

### Margaret’s Spicy Tomato Soup

*Makes about 10 to 12 quarts*

- 14 quarts ripe tomatoes, cut up but not peeled
- 4 hot peppers
- ¼ cup salt
- 10 small onions, coarsely chopped
- 10 ribs celery, coarsely chopped
- 25 whole cloves, or 1 teaspoon ground
- 14 sprigs parsley
- 14 bay leaves
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 1 pound butter
- 2 cups flour

Put all of the ingredients except the sugar, butter and flour together in a large cook pot.

Cook until everything is tender, about an hour and a half.

Put through a food mill or chinois (straining cone) and put back into the pot.

Add the brown sugar and stir to incorporate.

Melt the butter in a one-quart pan and gradually add the flour, whisking the whole time until the roux bubbles and thickens. Remove from the heat.

Reheat the soup, and gradually add the roux, stirring steadily to prevent lumping, and bring it all to a boil.

Put into clean, hot quart-sized canning jars, seal and process for 20 minutes.

Margaret’s recipe calls for hot peppers. The full recipe needs four, but Margaret wrote, “I don’t like it that hot, so I use one hot green pepper with the seeds and probably one or two more without the seeds.” Clearly it is one of those to-your-own-taste situations.

There are lots of different kinds of hot peppers that you can grow in your own garden or buy in the grocery store. If you like capsi-cums, then you probably have favorites that you will use. I am growing semi-hot peppers this year, and I used those figuring if we needed more zip, I could add dried red peppers or even a squirt or two from the hot sauce bottle.

If you are new to pepperdom, start with jalapenos, and remove the seeds.

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## There’s a little problem taking flight in my kitchen

Little cups have taken up residence on surfaces around my kitchen. They are of different sizes and shapes, but bear a few striking resemblances: Each cup has plastic wrap tightly fitted on the top, secured with a rubber band saved from my morning newspaper delivery. Each one has little holes pricked in the top with the knife point of my favorite paring knife. And each one has a thin layer of a robust, fragrant balsamic vinegar in the bottom.

It seems we’re in fruit fly season, and this is my home-grown solution to ending the little buggers’ reign of terror in my kitchen. They appeared overnight, the tiny, slow-moving flies. And just when I was certain the problem was handled, they reappeared in spades.



SARAH WALKER CARON  
MAINE COURSE



Honey Cinnamon Applesauce.

So far, the balsamic vinegar cups are working. Mostly. Turns out fruit flies are attracted to this particular vinegar. I tried a delicious red wine, a fruity white wine vinegar and a liquor as well, but the balsamic attracted the most by far.

I’ve read that I should also heat together some vinegar and water and pour that down my drains to further eradicate the problem —

it seems fruit flies like to reproduce in drains — so I plan to do that soon too. I need to. Because this problem needs to end — yesterday.

Perhaps if we had dirty dishes piled in the sink, rotting fruit on the counter and half-drunk juices hanging out, I would understand why so many fruit flies have taken up residence in our small, lovingly used kitchen. But

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SARAH WALKER CARON | BDN