

La Baguette Parisienne generates rising interest

By Valerie Vinyard



The cases are full at La baguette Parisienne.

(Noelle Haro-Gomez/Contributor)

The first thing you'll notice is the aroma.

When you step out of your car in the Broadway Plaza on Broadway Boulevard and Pantano Road, you'll get a whiff of freshly baked bread emanating from La Baguette Parisienne.

The scent is what lured shopper Marianne Potter to the bakery on a recent weekday.

"I was leaving Sprouts (Farmers Market) next door, and I smelled something wonderful," Potter said. "I had to check it out."

Potter, 48, left the eastside bakery with a box of pastries and a baguette.

"I think this will be the start of a long relationship," she said, laughing.

Kim Ireland and EJ Marx bought La Baguette Parisienne Nov. 18 from longtime owners Norm and Mel Marini. Norm's father opened the bakery in 1983.

"I used to go to that bakery when I was a kid," said Ireland, 41.

Co-owner Marx, Ireland's personal and professional partner, is a longtime chef and used to own a food cart called Star Dog that used wholesale bread from La Baguette Parisienne.

When Marx heard the owners were closing, he told Ireland, and the two worked out a plan to try and buy the bakery.

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At first, the owners weren't interested in selling. After about 10 days of discussions, they relented, and the bakery rose again. Ireland and Marx officially bought the bakery on Oct. 1, and its grand opening was Nov. 18.

In addition to the regulars, the news was a relief to the 25 or so restaurants that rely on La Baguette Parisienne for their bread and rolls.

"A lot of the old customers came back," said La Baguette Parisienne's general manager Beverly Bruning, 27. "But we're reaching a whole new set of people."

That's partly because the bakery now has a social media presence, and Ireland is working on adding online ordering and custom cake ordering on the website.

Before they reopened, Ireland and Marx gutted and renovated the 3,000-square-foot space. Walls were knocked out, and a new ceiling and new pastry cases were installed. They added new equipment in the kitchen, including an oven imported from France that uses steam to bake the dozens of baguettes every day. The resulting look is brighter and fresher.

"I feel like we've accomplished so much in the past eight months," said Ireland, who has a psychology degree from the UA.

Changes included extending the bakery's hours and accepting credit cards. Not everything changed, though.

"We kept all of the same recipes, all of the same stuff, but we also added a lot of stuff," Ireland said. "If things were working, we didn't want to change them."

The bakery employs 28 employees, and Ireland said that most of the former employees stayed on. As a longtime employee in the restaurant industry, Ireland believes in taking care of her employees.

"I make sure they make a livable wage," Ireland said. "I'm making sure employees are supported, are valued and are paid."

Marx handles the breads, and Ireland runs the business side, such as invoicing and payroll.

She now can add "baker" to the list, too.

"The pastry side was lacking," Ireland said, "so in December, I jumped back there and took that department over."

Ireland and her new baker continue to use the time-tested recipes from the original owners, but she's added many new desserts.

"I didn't know it would be something I'd be good at," she said. "EJ's a chef and he's incredible, but he was so busy with perfecting the bread."



EJ Marx and Kim Ireland own La Baguette Parisienne in Tucson.

(Noelle Haro-Gomez/Contributor)

What surprises many customers are the low prices. A slice of New York cheesecake costs \$3.25, a fat éclair topped with chocolate runs \$4.25 and a full-size coconut cream pie costs \$15.95.

"We really try to keep the prices reasonable," said Ireland, who gives kids free rolls when they come in. "The reaction has been a really, really positive one."

"We want to be that family place where kids can come in and pick out what they want, and the parents don't freak out about the price."

At least 10 breads are available daily. Depending on the size and type, loaf prices range from \$2.65 to \$5.85 and include country whole grain, country French and rustic French. Besides the rolls, baguettes and Parisians, there's an epi, which Ireland described as bread shaped like a wheat stalk: "You get like 10 rolls to an epi," she said. For smaller appetites, there are jocos (\$1.90), or smaller-sized French loaves. A customer favorite is Bavarian rye, which is offered Tuesdays and Fridays.

"We have the best baguettes in town; our bread is so good," Ireland said.

For those with a sweet tooth, La Baguette Parisienne offers about 30-plus pastries a day.

"Everyone comes for the bread, but the highest sellers are the pastries," Bruning said.

Once you gaze at the pastry cases, you'll see why.

Rows of croissants, Danish pastries, cakes, cookies, tarts, cheesecakes, are artfully arranged in several cases.

Try a "mini hand pie," which is a puff pastry rolled in cinnamon and sugar and filled with an apple or cherry.

"I had heard about this place for a while, and then I finally went there," said Ben Durham, a 42-year-old self-described dessert lover who "lives for pastries." "These are fresh. And they cost less than a lot of places in town."

La Baguette Parisienne

7851 E. Broadway, Tucson

520-296-1711

labaguettesparisienne.com

Hours: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays to Thursdays and Sundays; 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Closed Mondays.