

## Pastry shop brings a touch of Paris to Manitou Springs

-Guy Priel

In a small storefront on Manitou Springs' "Quiet Side", farther along Manitou Avenue from the hustle and bustle of downtown, sits the nondescript, yet incredibly smelling Manitou French Pastries. The shop, located at 1141 Manitou Ave., just down the street from Tubby's Turnabout Grocery and D & D Liquor, serves hot drinks, quiche and a variety of pastries found in a small Parisian cafe.

The owner and operator of the shop, Nicholas Adkins, is a native of West Virginia. He loves what he does, but his original calling was far-removed from baking. With a PhD in biochemistry and a specialization in cancer research, he spent seven years as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester. He relocated to Colorado Springs when his wife found a job. He was hoping to find a job as a professor or in some type of research.

"Believe it or not, there is some similarity between baking and cancer research," Adkins said. "When I was doing research, the biggest component was sourdough yeast, the key ingredient in French baking." Being familiar with the life cycle of yeast has helped a lot in developing the bakery.

Finding that his passion was no longer vested in teaching, he attended culinary school at the urging of friends and family members, ultimately completing a four-month intensive program at Cook Street School of Culinary Arts in Denver. He also spent a year studying at the Gastronomic Culinary Academy in Agde, France. That's where he became inspired to get involved in French baking.

His lab-refined sense of precision and adherence to protocol made him a fine cook and helped him become adept with pastries.

"I wanted to open a restaurant of some kind and fell into the pastry shop idea," he said. "It went well."

Baking something as finicky as pastry in the high altitude environment of Colorado made things challenging when he started, but he has since learned how to adapt and that has become a major asset for him.

"In France I got a taste for pastries and their style of baking," Adkins said. "During the lessons I was provided a chance to sample products to determine what would work best for my interests and tastes."

Adkins spent some time in Vermont, where he says he breathed and lived bread. After settling into Manitou Springs, he began looking for a place to establish his business. He spent a year honing his macaron recipe, which is his main accomplishment. A macaron or French macaroon is a sweet meringue-based confection made with egg white, icing sugar, granulated sugar, almond meal, and food coloring. There is some variation in whether the term macaron or macaroon is used, and the related coconut macaroon is often confused with the macaron.

"I love Manitou," Adkins said. "It is quirky and there is nothing like this (a French bakery) here, or anywhere in Colorado Springs. This is a mountain resort town without a pastry shop. That just wasn't right, in my opinion, so I decided to open my shop here."

Although the shop has been opened since July 2018, Adkins expanded his business by going wholesale in December 2018. Since then, he has distributed his pastries to both locations of Loyal Coffee in Colorado Springs, the Perk Downtown in Colorado Springs and three shops in Manitou Springs.

“This is a good location at the edge of town,” Adkins said. “I like that I am off the main traffic area a little.”

He located the shop in April 2018 after it formerly housed a pet rescue center that placed stray animals with senior citizens. It took him three months to build out, clean and equip the 800 square foot space, none of which goes to waste.

“My best month tends to be November,” Adkins said, “And my best wholesale account so far has been Loyal Coffee. I am fully staffed with five people and they are great workers. I am very happy to be a part of the Manitou Springs community and I am looking to expand the wholesale end of the business.”

Since he began searching for the type of product he wanted to specialize in, he decided he liked high end pastries, such as cream puffs and fruit tarts, because there was such a wide variety.

“I use nothing artificial and all my products are made from scratch using local produce when available,” he said. “I use the finest, high end ingredients. Yes, that affects the price, but quality can’t be beat anywhere in the area. That is what sets us apart. The flavor is outstanding.”

One of his plans is to assist with the town improvement project to help get a larger sidewalk in front of the store so he can ultimately open a Paris type cafe at his location. He wants to keep the bakery active and increase his wholesale business.

“I am working on consistency with my pastries,” he said. “I have had a very good response, even though I am not downtown. We get a lot of repeat business and a lot of customers who drop in after receiving a referral from a friend. This is a niche that needed to be filled and we have been a success.”

His top selling item, other than macarons, are croissants. The shop also serves baguettes, boules, galettes, tarts and scones. The macarons come in lavender, vanilla and coconut. His greatest love is savory cooking, which he hopes to share when he is able to expand into a street cafe with outside seating.