



Olive Café & Baking Co.

BUILDING COMMUNITY BY THE BEACH



When Olive Café opened its doors in San Diego's Mission Beach twenty years ago, owner Sarah Mattinson could hardly imagine the journey ahead. After college, she spent several years managing a family bakery in Little Italy, learning the rhythms of business. A neighbor, impressed by her work ethic, helped her secure funding for the small breakfast-and-lunch spot she had always dreamed of.

Those first years were relentless. With just one full-time and one part-time employee, Sarah worked every day for five years. Sysco was part of the story from the very beginning, supplying just \$200 of product a week and going the extra mile when growing crowds made deliveries tricky. "If you treat someone when they're small the same as when they're big, it says a lot about a company," Sarah recalls.

Growth followed. Olive Café now employs 24 people and has expanded three times, while its wholesale-retail bakery, Olive Baking Company, located down the street, supports another dozen. The bakery idea struck Sarah during a trip to Italy, where she saw fresh bread being baked even in gas stations. Within months, she turned the inspiration into reality. Today, the bakery is known for its rustic loaves, indulgent cinnamon rolls, and kolaches—savory, handheld pastries Sarah calls "adult hot pockets."

Partnerships have been key to every stage of growth. Sysco has provided product flexibility, menu support, and regular chef reviews that keep Olive Café's offerings fresh. Since joining the Sysco Perks program, Sarah has gained greater convenience and control in her day-to-day operation. The ability to order six days a week allows her team to test new products quickly, experiment with menu innovations, and adapt faster to customer demand. "We often look to Sysco first when we want to introduce a new item," she says. "The flexibility gives us more options and helps us stay creative."

That flexibility shows up on the menu itself. Core favorites such as Dad's Pancakes, breakfast burritos, and the Cousin's Scramble keep regulars coming back, while seasonal specials and Sysco-driven ideas allow the team to evolve with guest expectations.

Community has always been at the heart of Olive Café. During the pandemic, the team pivoted quickly, transforming into a neighborhood grocery hub. Together with Sysco and local donations, the café coordinated up to 220 free grocery deliveries a day to seniors. Each year, Olive Café hosts a Labor Day barbecue for first responders and encourages the next generation of foodservice professionals

through competitions like ProStart. Sarah now serves as president of the California Restaurant Association, where she advocates for small operators across the state.

Looking back, Sarah credits persistence, community, and strong partnerships for Olive Café's success. Her advice to fellow operators is simple: know your numbers, keep your overhead manageable, and lean into your community.

As Olive Café celebrates its 20th anniversary, its guiding principles remain unchanged: to serve neighbors well, support employees like family, and nurture the relationships that allow the business to thrive.



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