

Food for Thought

People · Products · Purpose

July 2022

"The lesson I read in the past is this: that the health of land and water — and of woods, which are the keepers of water — can be the only lasting basis for any civilization's survival and success."

— Historian Ronald Wright, author of *A Short History of Progress*



Locally made, French inspired

Leah Johnson started making French pastries from scratch at a very young age. Many years later she turned her love of baking into a business.

Mastering the art of fine French pastries came easy for Leah Johnson. It also came early. "When I was about 12, I had a serious sweet tooth, as did my dad, but my mom wasn't much of a baker or much interested in it. So she handed me a cookbook and said, here, bake your way through this. I basically did, without realizing it had a lot of French things in it. To me they were just delicious things I loved, like cream puffs. I made my first strudel when I was 14, with dough hanging all over the table." (Strudel dough, which is similar to filo, has to be stretched rather than rolled.) It made the ideal backdrop for perfecting her baking skills. "Dad loved everything I made, and my mom did all the dishes and never complained, so I had an audience, and I had an assistant to clean up after me. What's not to love?" she recalls. After leaving home, she landed a corporate job,



traveling three weeks out of four. She did that for many years, but when she moved to Colorado Springs with two young kids to raise, she left corporate life behind and took up French baking again. In 2014, she turned it into a business.

Le Petit Croissant got its start at area farmers markets, but many of her products are also available at Ranch Foods Direct, which she describes as "like a farmers market only it's more reliable than a traditional farmers market. And



it has such a wonderful anchor, Callicrate Beef — I have to say, the steaks are amazing — and that alone draws people," she says.

The store's flexibility allows her to experiment and bring in different products

and flavors from week to week. The classic croissants and elegant macarons are staples, along with gem-like jars of jam, but she also does items like quiche, scones and cupcakes. Many products feature Colorado ingredients including Palisade cherries and peaches.



Climbing that hill

Local craft beverage owners see value in outreach, diversification and pursuing a cooperative retail complex

Entrepreneurial couple Matt Bonno and Katelyn Murray feel fortunate to run a cidery and tasting room a few doors down from Ranch Foods Direct's Peak to Plains Food Hub, in addition to living just a short jaunt from RFD's Fillmore store. The owner-operators of the craft beverage company behind Boxing Brothers Cider, Monte Cervino Wine and Daredevil Coffee would love to see dozens of RFD outlets scattered all over town providing more access to healthy, high quality food direct from the source.

"Friday is our grocery shopping day, and that's when we grab our food for the week," Matt explains. "It feels like such a blessing to have Ranch Foods Direct right next door. It would be easy to take it for granted.

Everyone needs the opportunity to have something like this in their neighborhood. Taking away our access to Ranch Foods Direct would, without a doubt, negatively impact our life significantly. I feel like it's so important that everybody be able to experience what it's like to buy good quality meat direct from a rancher."

It's not just a nice idea. There's a new sense of urgency post-pandemic, after seeing the vulnerabilities of longer, more impersonal supply chains and fewer local suppliers.



Already known for their inventive craft ciders, Matt and Katelyn officially launched Daredevil Coffee at the International Hill Climb Fan Fest in late June. As mutual motorsports fanatics, they often sponsor family-friendly events like the Hot Rod Rock and Rumble at Pikes Peak International Raceway.

"I think it showed a lot of cracks in the system," Matt says. "If we continue down this road we're on, it will be the same old chains and the same old food producers, the same old suppliers, and we'll all be stuck with four or five choices for craft beer, for craft wine, and for beef."

"As an employee," he adds, "you'll be working with an HR department at distant headquarters somewhere, maybe in some other state, as opposed to walking down the hall and talking with your boss face-to-face."

From the moment Matt heard Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate first talk about creating a concept where small business operators would have ownership in a shared venue, he was all in. "Mike nails it," he says. "Too often the people who run the company don't own the space they're in. When you have a small business that isn't sending money off to an obscure rental company somewhere, they are more profitable. They are paying their employees more and bringing in higher quality products, and all of that gets passed on to the customer. Beyond just the excellence of the product, the money is also staying in the local community."

Matt and Katelyn have rapidly outgrown their existing space at 4655 Town Center Dr, especially with the launch of Katelyn's new coffee venture. A self-described "coffee fiend," she custom-roasts carefully curated beans aged in different barrels to create fun and interesting flavors. Her business will start off strictly online, but she'd love to add a retail outlet. "That would be really great for our brand," she says.

She finds funding for value-based businesses

Anna Straus is responsible for helping Ranch Foods Direct land a recent USDA grant of \$150,000, which will be used to add more commercial kitchen space to the Peak to Plains Food Hub at 4635 Town Center. She's also helping to identify potential funding sources for a new cooperative market project that will bring together Colorado food entrepreneurs who want to invest in a mutually owned retail and community gathering space.

Anna is originally from New Jersey but moved to Colorado to work in education. "That's when I started to question why the kids were eating such bad food," she says. Her concerns led her to Ranch Foods Direct and owner Mike Callicrate's work on promoting better access to local high quality food for schools and colleges. Inspired, she went on to earn a degree in social work from the University of Denver with an emphasis on food justice and food systems work. "When I graduated, I knew I wanted to work on building a better food system," she explains.

She has since worked for nonprofit organizations such as Farm Action, which allows her to be involved with innovative developmental projects across the U.S. and even around the world.

She's particularly thrilled to contribute to plans for a new retail concept that would include Ranch Foods Direct as an anchor tenant. "I like it in part because nothing like this has been done before," she says. The idea is to create something similar to a food hall, only better. "I love food halls; there are just so many options when you're out with a group of friends. As a consumer, I really like the energy in that space, but beyond that — as someone who knows about food systems, about rent-collecting developers and how poorly workers are treated — the existing food halls are just not value-aligned. Our concept would be all locally sourced, with the manufacturing and distribution located right on

Anna Straus advises small businesses on how to obtain grants and loans. She recently helped the Peak to Plains Food Hub secure a grant that will be used to build out more space for cooking and smoking value-added meat products.



site. And glass walls everywhere, so everyone can see how their beer is being brewed or how their steaks are being cut. Most importantly, it will give business owners a huge opportunity to actually own their space and have some equity in it instead of just paying rent to someone else. When these business owners are ready to retire, they'll have ownership in something."

As a devoted Ranch Foods Direct customer, Anna appreciates having a local source of humanely raised meat. "I love pork. It's my favorite. I really like the pork belly and bacon. I make crispy pork belly tacos all the time. And of course the steaks are unparalleled."

True community building cultivates assets for small business owners

The vast majority of food halls, farmers market venues and small business districts are owned by developers rather than by the food entrepreneurs whose creative talents bring them to life. Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate has been laying out a vision to potential investors of a better alternative: using a cooperative model to finance a destination food and beverage marketplace. At an informational meeting held inside the conference room of the Peak to Plains Food Hub in June, his ideas were met with an enthusiastic endorsement from Terri Hayes, president and CEO of the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce (inset.)

The rampant growth along the Front Range often isn't edifying or community enhancing, she observed. "People are tired of seeing more dentist offices and orthodontists and those sorts of things, they want something fun," she told the group, adding they also want something that recaptures the small town essence that once defined life in Colorado.



Mike believes by creating market collectives, small business operators can turn their hard work into hard assets while putting down roots through ownership in their local communities. Planning approvals for the inaugural first-of-its-kind retail venue could come as early as November.



IN STORE NOW: Grab-and-go summer sides including house-made deviled egg potato salad and Monika's famous power munch, a light and refreshing quinoa and kale salad featuring a lemon vinaigrette.

SAVORY BREAD PUDDING BREAKFAST MUFFINS

*1 loaf sourdough bread
8 eggs
1 cup half-and-half
1/3 cup real maple syrup
1 1/2 cup crumbled cooked sausage
or smoked diced ham
1 cup cubed cheddar cheese*

Cut bread into cubes and place in large bowl. In smaller bowl, mix eggs, half-and-half and syrup. Gently stir in meat and cheese. Pour mixture over bread. Cover and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, preheat oven to 325 degrees and line muffin tins. Fill 12 lined cups with mixture and place tin on baking sheet. Add hot water to bottom sheet, place carefully in oven and bake one hour. Remove muffins and serve or freeze.

Shop steaks, burgers and brats for Independence Day weekend! Shipping available.

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Natural Meat Market

Two retail locations in Colorado Springs!

Flagship store: 1228 E. Fillmore, 719-623-2980

Summer Retail Hours: Mon - Sat 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Food hub: 4635 Town Center Drive, 719-559-0873

Retail Hours Mon - Fri 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Saturdays 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

CLOSED Monday, July 4th, for the holiday!

Open 24/7 online at RanchFoodsDirect.com