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Pizza, pasta, and a nice place to eat Ethel's at 250 moves into historic Bayfield building

By KEVIN O'BRIEN
The Daily Press
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Kevin O'Brien

Sally and Bill Heytens, originally of Superior, stand in front of their new Bayfield restaurant, Ethel's at 250, which offers fair-priced pizza, pasta and appetizers.

BAYFIELD — When Superior natives Bill and Sally Heytens decided to travel around the country and look for a spot to start a new business, it wasn't until they arrived in Bayfield — about 40 miles from their hometown — that they found the place for their new lives to begin.

Bill had sold his lumber company in Superior, Sally had done the same with the Big Apple Bagels franchise she owned, and the couple had friends with a cabin on Madeline Island who introduced them to the Midwest's Best Small Town.

"It just dawned on us that moving to Bayfield and starting a business was a way to start over without moving halfway across the country," Sally said.

On May 24, after more than a year of major renovations, the Heytens opened their new restaurant, Ethel's at 250, in the heart of Bayfield's historic

downtown, effectively revitalizing one of Rittenhouse Avenue's longest-standing buildings.

Story Continues Below

"It was built in 1886 and it was a general store," she said. "People still refer to it as the Stark Store — Frank Stark's store."

Sally said the building "hasn't had a real long-term identity" since it was called the "Hillside Grocery Store" for about 30 years, so the Heytens hope to establish a new downtown hotspot with a combination of charming ambience, top-rate service and one-of-a-kind food.

Ethel's serves a wide variety of pizzas, pastas and appetizers with a mixture of local favorites and items not regularly found in Bayfield.

The Heytens came up with the idea of owning a pizza restaurant while vacationing on St. Martin island, where they regularly ate at a beachside pizza stand owned by men from France, Algeria and Morocco.

"There's all these American tourists in St. Martin buying pizza," Sally said. "It kind of bonked us on the head that pizza is a universal food."

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So far, their most popular pizza is the “Bayfield Special,” which incorporates the sweetness of Bayfield’s signature fruit.

"We decided that if we're going to be in Bayfield, we have to have a pizza with apples on it," she said. "People are loving it; it's a great pizza."

Another local delicacy, whitefish livers, has also been incorporated into one of their pizzas and a pasta dish, named after their friend Alan who came up with the idea.

Other items on Ethel's menu originally come from across the country, including the Kauaiian Pizza — inspired by their trips to the Hawaiian island where chicken is a delicacy — and chicken wings from the famous La Nova Pizzeria in Buffalo, New York.

The Heytens said they generated many of the ideas for menus while attending three different International Pizza Expos.

"We're not gourmet," Sally said. "We're good food at an affordable price."

Besides offering Bayfield diners a new place to eat, the Heytens have drawn a lot of attention from long-time residents and tourists who are impressed with the renovation of the prominent old building.

"We ask people 'What brought you in?' and they say 'We love what you've done with the place,'" Bill said.

Hiring Ashland architect Steve Schraufnagel, the Heytens started an interior renovation in May 2005 with a one-floor addition that now houses the couple's upstairs apartment, enabling them to live as year-round Bayfield residents.

"We're not going south in the winter," Bill said. "We'll travel some places, but we like the seasons."

The construction project, which was done with all-local workers, also provided the Heytens an opportunity to meet Bayfield's volunteer fire department when the back side of the building collapsed.

The Heytens recently returned the favor by hosting a retirement party for former fire chief Randy Erickson.

"Now that we are almost done with the construction, we intend to get involved in the community," Bill said.

Another question that has piqued visitors' interest is the restaurant's name, which belongs to Sally's 92-year-old mother, the daughter of Swedish immigrants who developed a reputation as one of Superior's most gracious hostesses.

Sally said they want to keep her mother's spirit of hospitality alive, so they serve as the restaurant's greeters and personally welcome all of their patrons to Bayfield.

The staff is rounded out by six full- and part-time kitchen staff and a wait staff made up almost entirely of young Bayfield ladies in high school and college.

"We've had a lot of great compliments on our servers," Sally said.

As the Heytens look forward to their future in Bayfield, they're considering the possibility of delivering pizzas — something currently lacking in the small tourist town.

But right now, they're just happy to be making good use of one of Bayfield's most prominent historic locations.

"We're really proud of what we did with the building," Bill said. "It's unbelievable how many people come in because of the building."

WHAT: Ethel's at 250, pizza and more

WHERE: 250 Rittenhouse Ave., Bayfield

WHO: Owners Bill and Sally Heytens

WHEN: Open 4 to 10 p.m.

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