



Left: **Washburne Chicken Salad Wrap**
Right: **Beth Mason, Karen Hageman, Phillip Boateng**

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

A Springfield café connects past and future BY AARON RAGAN-FORE

Downtown Springfield's Main Street strip continues to tread the line between gentrified and generally sketchy. And the permanent closure of Ruthie B's Antiques in a couple of weeks marks the end of one of the neighborhood's anchoring storefronts.

But last May saw the addition of the Washburne Café, a homey breakfast and lunch place just down the street.

"I wanted to create a place that I'd like to go, that was comfortable and welcoming," says café owner Karen Hageman. Originally from New Jersey, Hageman says the Washburne is her first foray into restaurant ownership after stints in construction, real estate and retail.

At breakfast time, Hageman's new venture serves various egg dishes with cibatta toast, including a "Washburne bowl" with eggs, meat and potatoes. Lunchtime fare includes paninis on locally-baked focaccia, as well as house-made soups. The chicken salad wrap is especially tasty and includes cucumbers and cranberries in the mix. Fluffy, house-made baked goods include tropical fruit scones and peach muffins, complemented by a coffee bar ... and free Wi-Fi.

"It's getting busier all the time as word gets out," says Hageman.

And she seems to be right. During a recent visit at almost 2 pm on a weekday afternoon, the lunch rush had yet to abate. The crowd proved eclectic, too. Some patrons read while dining alone. A couple of parents had children in tow. A group of college students, laptops and calculators spread across a round table by the window, discussed APR and interest rates.

Hageman says she has the city government to thank for her success. "It's just a real can-do place to be," she says of Springfield. "When the voters passed the urban renewal issue, I was appointed to the advisory committee for the Downtown Urban Renewal District.

"It's one of the most exciting things to be on the ground floor of a developing downtown," Hageman adds.

Part of developing that downtown, in Hageman's book, is supporting area artists. Photography and art by locals line the walls, and the Washburne is a stop on Springfield's Second Friday Art Walk. On those nights the café features live music, most recently a four-piece jazz band.

"I had well over a hundred people from five to eight," says Hageman, who has applied for a beer and wine license to accommodate the artsy folks.

Entering the café, one of the first things a patron notices is that the charmingly mismatched farmhouse

furniture and historic photos of old Springfield lining the walls make it a natural fit for Main Street's antiques row.

An investigation by a UO student revealed that the Washburne storefront dates back to 1906, and was originally used as the Springfield Armory. The building has been home to a hardware store, a real estate office and, more recently, a spa.

Once upon a time it was a bank as well, and Hageman enjoys playing history detective in her new digs. "You can see where there are indentations," she says of the in the Douglas fir floorboards, pointing out the "little teeny pock marks that run in four little rows" where spike-soled men from the local mills stood in line to cash checks or make deposits.

Hageman says she hopes the Washburne will make some history of its own. "I like the community feel," she says. "I am a huge Springfield proponent."

Now it's time to see if downtown Springfield is a proponent of Hageman, and of The Washburne Café. ■

The Washburne Café, 326 Main St, Springfield. 746-7999; open 7:30am-5pm Mon.-Fri.; 8am-4pm Sat.

PHOTOS BY KAI HAYASHI

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