

CZECH INTO TEXAS

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

DREAMING UP EUROPEAN PASTRIES WITH A SOUTHWESTERN TWIST BY BRIAN PALMER

In July 2012, Jennifer Petersen, Beau Mollinary and Aaron Nankin — three transplants from Utah, Texas and Connecticut, respectively — opened Chaos Kolaches in Springfield, hoping to introduce this Czechoslovakian pastry to the area. It was little more than a shot in the dark.

“We realized there weren’t any kolache places out here,” says Petersen. “We thought, ‘Well, it’ll be a new product nobody’s ever heard of so we’ll try it and see how it goes.’”

And the result?

“We were very, very wrong,” Petersen exclaims with a laugh. “We had no idea how many people were just like us and had been missing kolaches. Tons of Texans came in saying, ‘I haven’t had a kolache since college,’ or their childhood. So we definitely hit a nerve and have tapped into a nostalgic market we had no idea existed.”

Like pizza, the kolache takes on a variety of forms. The Moravian kolache is more cookie-like, while the Bohemian kolache is more yeast-based. You can put fruit filling in the middle, and though purists will disagree, you can also put meat, cheese or any number of other ingredients in there. Even outlandish ones.

“We made a diablo kolache,” Petersen says, “which had three kinds of peppers: habanero, jalapeno and chipotle. It was very spicy. Aaron had to wear a mask while he was prepping it.”

There is a lot of trial and error when making their creations — Petersen spent an entire year learning how to get the dough just right — and some of their best ones have come about accidentally.

“Aaron was in charge of pouring the Ghirardelli caramel on top of the apple kolaches one day and accidentally started pouring it all over the pear,” Petersen laughs. “So we were like, ‘What are you doing? That’s the pear!’ But now it’s one of our best sellers.”

Petersen and the store’s third owner, Mollinary, have known each other for almost two decades, when they worked for a business in Texas that owned several

restaurants. Thanks to a large Czech population, kolaches are a popular treat in the Lone Star State.

Petersen and Mollinary have extensive restaurant experience, and Petersen loves cooking, so opening this shop was a no-brainer, especially considering how well the kolache has fared in the Midwest.

“Kolaches are big throughout the Midwest,” Petersen says. “There are lots of Czechoslovakian communities out there, and it’s part of their way of life. We always took kolaches to study groups when we were in college, and we thought it was like any coffee shop or donut shop. We thought they were everywhere.”

Perhaps the best part of this experience for Petersen has been watching the community and customers embrace the shop and get involved themselves.

“I have customers who bring in recipes all the time,” Petersen says. “One brought me a rhubarb recipe. Another suggested we do orange-cranberry. I’ll try anything. The people here really get into it and are excited about it. And because of the popular demand we’re even going to do a kolache-making class because this is really a dying art.”

Not bad for a business they weren’t sure was going to work. ■

Chaos Kolaches is open M-F from 7 am to 2 pm and Sa 8 am to noon at 388 Q Street, Springfield.



PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

TOP: BACON, EGG & CHEESE KOLACHE • BOTTOM: BEAU MOLLINARY PREPS THE DOUGH