

Pizza shop creates a living legacy
 -Continued from PAGE ONE
 Next came Breaking Clean, a seasonal business doing chores like washing windows, cleaning gutters and pressure-washing buildings.

"I just wanted a hobby to make a little extra on weekends," says Brannon. But word spread. "That's Heppner. As long as you do a good job, people will discuss it," he adds. "I didn't really have a choice but to make it a business."

"I fell right into the rabbit hole."
 With the addition of the pizza shop, they tried to continue the trend in names, but say it didn't quite work.

"We were trying to name it Breaking Pizza, but that just didn't roll off the tongue," says Brannon. Similar attempts like Breaking Dough and Breaking Crust didn't catch their ears, either. That was when Tayllor Brannon suggested, "What about DeSpain Pizza?"

"We looked at each other and said, 'Yup, that's it.'" The name came from Drew's maternal grandparents, Bob and Aloha DeSpain. He says the name is a way to honor two people who were influential in his life.

"They built my foundation for being a Christian," he says. "During the hard times of my life, they helped me tremendously." He adds that they also helped Tayllor and he early in their marriage, teaching them to be respectful of each other, always love, and communicate everything.

Brannon adds that, while Bob and Aloha DeSpain's legacy lives on, there is no family left to carry on the DeSpain name.

"We wanted to dedicate something to remember their name," says Brannon. "Because they loved so many, because they were loved by so many, we thought this was a really great tribute to them."

Not only is the name of the restaurant a tribute, but nearly every menu item is dedicated to a grandparent or other family member. The 1946 pizza refers to the year Bob and Aloha were married. The Red refers to uncle Bobby DeSpain, who's nickname was Red. The Aloha, of course, was named after Grandma Aloha DeSpain. Navy Knots, DeSpain Pizza's answer to bread sticks, are named

for Grandpa Bob's service in the Navy Armed Guard, and Shakeys are named after one of the DeSpain grandparents' favorite pizza places in The Dalles.

The Ron and Tami is named after Tayllor's grandparents, Ron and Tami Stutzman, who were killed in a car accident Dec. 30 of last year.

"They moved down because they were going to babysit for us," Brannon says, adding that they lived in Drew and Tayllor's living room for nine months, helping with William, five, and Wesley, age four. "Without them, there's no way we'd have the successes we have today."

Aside from the legacy of DeSpain Pizza, Drew and Tayllor say they want it to be special in other ways.

"I wanted pizza someone would crave when they came back to Heppner," says Brannon.

He says the dough, technically called neo-Neopolitan, takes three days to make using a cold bulk fermentation. He had no experience with pizza, so to find the right method, he spent hours and hours doing research, sometimes staying up till 2 a.m.

"When you go down the rabbit hole, you get stuck there," he says.

Another thing that makes the dough special is hand-tossing.

"Hand tossing the dough is the fun way to do it, and it's the best way to stretch the dough," says Brannon. He says the result is a thick crust that's great for tearing off and dipping. "That's always been my favorite—a good, thick crust."

"Our crust is unlike any other in this area," he says simply.

Future plans involve a salad bar—a must-have for Grandpa Ron—and an arcade, though the second will be a year or two down the road.

"There's not a lot of places where kids can go and just hang out," Brannon says. "Why not be that fun hangout spot?"

Drew and Tayllor also put thought into the kind of environment they want at DeSpain Pizza.

"Bob and Aloha were the life of the party. They were so much fun. Everyone loved talking to them," says Brannon. He says that's what inspired

the party-like atmosphere at DeSpain Pizza.

"There's a lot of dancing. The music is loud. This is where those chaotic families can come and the kids can run around," he says. "Our life is chaos, so why not have a business that thrives on chaos?"

So far, their methods are working. In the first six days, they recorded using 565 pounds of cheese and 315 pounds of red sauce, serving more than 136 customers at an average of 20 pizzas an hour, and throwing 600 pounds of dough. (In fact, Drew had to sit down for an interview with the G-T on his own because Tayllor had to make yet another run for groceries and supplies.)

Brannon says a lot of that is due to having a phenomenal team. That's another thing he says makes what they do so special—the ability to hire employees and watch them flourish.

"It's one of the most rewarding things we've ever found we could help with. We don't want cookie-cutter employees," he says, adding that they have 19 employees among their five businesses. "We love teaching and helping other people grow, just being a small business where we can help 19 different families."

"We have the best team. They're phenomenal."

Even so, their work hours have gone from an average of 60 per week to 82-84 hours per week. It doesn't seem to be sapping either their energy or their purpose. In fact, the couple seems to thrive on it.

"When we open the doors, it starts the day over. It's like a reset," says Brannon. "We're just excited to serve pizza."

DeSpain Pizza is open seven days a week, 12-4 p.m. on Sunday and Wednesday and 4-8 p.m. the other five days.

Heppner needs more buildable land,
 -Continued from PAGE SEVEN
 that same direction, but it also hasn't been going down dramatically. It kind of waves from year to year," said Points. "That is saying something, for a town of this size to sustain. A lot of times, towns of this size, you tend to have a really negative economic shock such as the mill closure, and then it never really recovers."

He finished by saying that Heppner has an estimated 90 gross acres of commercial land, 150 gross acres of industrial land, and 40 gross acres of public land within the UGB.

"A small portion of that is vacant. There's not a lot of vacant land according to the process we've worked on so far," he said.

"We can't get away from the fact that we need the planning and zoning process to be an ally in this. I think when you get into smaller communities, it's not necessarily always seen that way. But you can't just do whatever you want on your land. You need to be aware of the constraints, the restrictions, the competition for land within a certain urban growth area. It takes forethought to determine what is the best use," he added. "That said, on the other side of the coin, this is America and we have property rights."

On a positive note, though, Points said there are positive changes ahead at the South Morrow County Industrial Park. Known to most as the site of the old Kinzua mill, the industrial park is technically outside Heppner's UGB, so doesn't affect the city's buildable lands, but would have an impact on Heppner if developed.

Kim Cutsforth told the crowd that the Kinzua mill site is in the flood plain, and in some places is at the base flood elevation. Where Eric Chick is, the base flood elevation is eight feet in some spots in his building.

"You can't put any utilities or anything below. You can't have light switches, plug-ins, anything for a foot above the base flood elevation. He can't improve his building legally, and he can't add on," Cutsforth said. "In the mill site, in many places, it is like that."

The mill site is about 84 acres. Most of that is in the flood plain. A current flood abatement project will give the mill site about a 60-acre gain, bringing usable acres from 25 to 70.

Anderson & Perry Engineering is developing a plan to dig swale, or deep ditches, along the creek. That will allow floodwater to flow outside of the creek but not infringe on the bulk of the mill site. That brings about 60 acres, including Eric Chick's property, out of the flood plain, making it completely open to development.

Cutsforth said she has been working to find a way to use the mill site for about three years, but no one wanted to take the risk. About a month ago, Melissa Lindsay directed Cutsforth to Business Oregon, and Cutsforth wrote a grant with the Port of Morrow. Early in February, they were advised they would receive two million for the project. The Port has already started the process.

"We're going to start seeing things happen down there, too," said Cutsforth. "It's exciting, and it will change. We have people all the time looking for places to put stuff. And industrial land, you can pretty much do anything. It's huge."

Heppner Mayor Corey

Sweeney pointed out that there are currently people wanting to move to Heppner who can't because there isn't enough housing.

"It would be great for the future to have more industry," said Sweeney, "but right now we need to have the people who would move, move here."

"If you can't grow your population, it's hard for the employment to get tugged along with that," Points agreed. "So somewhere in this forecast we do need to say how many houses will be built here in the next 20 years."

Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) is currently working to develop 22 acres for housing in Heppner, but is having trouble getting enough water pressure to the site.

Kim Cutsforth raised the issue of childcare. Heppner has two preschools but only one day care, and it is "operating fairly full," she said. Both preschools are at capacity. Heppner has no infant care.

"It's an expensive endeavor, but we need it desperately," said Cutsforth. "I just don't know how we're going to get it."

Kraig Cutsforth addressed the issue of downtown businesses. He said there were storefronts not in use because interested businesses wanted more parking and there was no room to build it. Heppner councilor Sharon Inskeep added that she had received complaints about parking downtown, especially at noon time.

OLD TIMERS' NIGHT
Thursday, March 2nd
Dinner at 6:00pm/Lodge at 8:00

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