

Seaside baker prepares to open storefront

Michael Soprano brings wholesale experience and a passion for cakes and baking

By Mike Williams
EO Media Group

Michael Soprano spent the past two years building up his wholesale and custom clientele, making cakes, cupcakes and other baked goods; now he's ready to take the operation to Main Street.

Well, North Holladay Drive, actually. Soprano plans to open Three Little Birds Bakery next to Beach Books in the Gilbert Block.

He hopes to have the store open by the end of March, in time to catch the spring break crowds.

Soprano and Beach Books owner Karen Emmerling may open the double doors between the stores.

"A book store and a bakery go perfect together," he said.

He's still working on the menu. He's got the general menu worked out, but he'll be rotating items on a regular basis.

"So it's not going to be one set menu all the time," he said. "A few things are going to have flavors of the week."

He's also soliciting menu suggestions on his Facebook page.

To avoid duplicating his neighbors' offerings, he will not offer donuts or specialty coffee. He'll have drip coffee, but not the espresso and



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Baker Michael Soprano specializes in "cakes with a flair," including this Super Bowl cake. He plans to open his Seaside bakery at the end of March.

other items offered across the street.

Staying true to his Italian heritage, he plans to offer cannoli and other Italian items you can't find in town.

He also offers gluten-free, dairy-free and some vegan options.

Soprano continues to take orders for cakes and other items while he prepares to open the shop on Holladay. He specializes in cakes with flair.

There's the golf course cake complete with putting green and the gingerbread castle under attack by a fire-breathing dragon.

In a bit of irony, he made a giant cupcake for a customer in Astoria. This wholesale customer stocked

vanilla chai cupcakes for a coffee shop. Her daughter loved the cupcakes, so Soprano made a vanilla chai cupcake that was 10 inches in diameter and 10 inches tall.

"I've always been an artist growing up, and this is basically artistry with icing," he said.

Visitors will be able to watch him decorate cakes at the bakery.

Building the business

Soprano's going all in as he adds the retail component to his business.

"I'm investing pretty much everything I've got," he said. "I'm still working on some of the traditional financing as well."

Soprano, a Navy veteran, also

has access to funding as a disabled veteran.

He sought help as he's built his business.

He received counseling from the Score mentoring office in Vancouver and from the Small Business Development Center office in Seaside.

The community has been supportive, he said. Word of mouth has proven to be his most effective marketing tool.

"Once people taste it, next thing I know a week later I get somebody saying, 'I was at so and so's party and had one of your cakes. I've got a birthday coming up; can you do mine?'"

Down-home atmosphere

The name of the business is a tribute to his favorite Bob Marley song and to his three daughters who happen to love birds. The song was playing on the Internet radio as he was putting the business plan together. The song finished and immediately started playing again.

He took it as a sign.

This North Carolina native and his wife met when he was in the Navy. She grew up in the Seaside area. The family moved here in 2006.

He had always enjoyed baking. "My mother used to do all the family's wedding cakes and all that," he said, "and with me being the youngest, I was in the kitchen helping, and I learned a lot more than I thought I did."

Baking stayed with him as he got older. After 10 years in the Navy, friends and family encouraged him to make a living with the mixer and the oven.

In addition to his other tasty menu items, his grandmother's 100-year-old recipe for vanilla pound cake and southern desserts will likely make the list.

Soprano aims for a warm, homey feel to Three Little Birds Bakery when he opens in the Gilbert Block.

"I don't want to be one of these modern upscale big-city bakeries," he said. "I want you to feel like you're having something at your mother's house."

First Saturday Art Walk set for Feb. 7

Seaside's First Saturday Art Walk is set from 5 to 7 p.m. Feb. 7.

Art-centric events are booked in businesses between Holladay Drive and Broadway in the historic Gilbert District. Complimentary parking for the Gilbert Block is available on the corner of Holladay Drive and Oceanway.

Participating businesses and their artists are:

- T. Anjuli's, 5 N. Holladay Drive: Artist Billy Lutz is the owner/resident artist. His art work focuses on what lies beneath appearances.
- Seaside Coffee House,

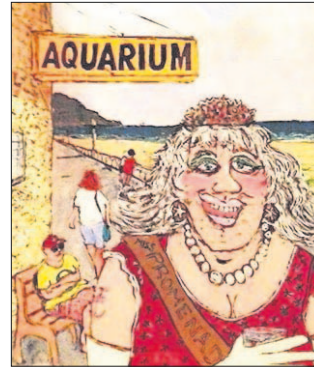
3 N. Holladay Drive: Artist Morgan Soller works in richly detailed drawings using colored pencils and ink.

• Beach Books, 616 Broadway: Featuring Arctic Light, an image by Neal Maine/PacificLight Nature Images. Karen Marsten Emmerling and Denise Fairweather are the co-sponsors of an upcoming presentation of Maine's Alaska adventures.

• J. Rae's Wines, 608 Broadway: Artist Marcus Lundell uses a traditional reverse glass painting technique on distressed windows, as well as new and vintage

picture frames, to create his images. His window views include classic landscapes and comedic characters — sometimes juxtaposed in the same scene.

• Fairweather House and Garden, 612 Broadway: Opens an exhibit called "Quiet Anticipation." Featured art will be from pastel artist Gretha Lindwood, realistic landscape painter Lori Aylesworth and nature photographer Neal Maine. Music Local musician Brad Griswold plans to play bluegrass, country, traditional fiddle tunes and jazz standards on acoustic guitar;



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Marcus Lundell's "Prom Queen," will be on display at J. Rae's Wines during the First Saturday Art Walk Feb. 7.

he is a member of the local band The Floating Glass Balls.

'Sweet Affaire' benefit lined up for Feb. 8

A Sweet Affaire is planned from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8, in the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

Sponsored by the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, the event showcases appetizers presented by area restaurants, specialty sweets, wineries, local brews and other beverages. Shirley Smith Yates will provide music.

Items for the silent and oral auctions can be

previewed on the "Sweet Affaire" Facebook page. Proceeds pay for scholarships for youth and others in the community.

In 2014 more than \$22,000 in scholarships were awarded for people to participate in district programs.

Tickets are \$35 and can be purchased at Sunset pool, 1140 Broadway, or call 503-738-3311 ext 101 or visit www.sunsetempire.com



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