

Historic Bake-Rite Bakery sold

Nina's Kitchen, a Russian bakery, expected to open soon

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WATSONVILLE — The day has already come and passed that the historic Bake-Rite Bakery, a Watsonville institution for as many as 70 years, will serve up their baked goods to the community.

So for those who were accustomed to ordering special-made cakes from Bake-Rite Bakery for weddings, birthday parties, first communions and other special events, time has already run out.

Forty-year owners Bob and Ann Johann have sold the business and its name for an undisclosed amount to a Russian family who are seeking to open a bakery and retail shop selling authentic Russian foods and

baked goods.

The Johanns have decided to retire after working daily in their shop.

"While we're happy to retire, we're sad because it's in our blood — 40 years is a long time," said Ann from the bakery Wednesday, the family's last day of business.

The business has been located in the East Lake Shopping Center for nearly 10 years after it relocated from its East Beach Avenue location after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

The earthquake brought the bakery's building tumbling to the ground, and caused the city's one fatality. Plaza Vigil, on the corner of East Beach and Union streets, now

sits where the bakery was once located.

"Downtown was the fun years," Ann said. "It was a special place down there."

They have worked almost daily in their shop, she said, and included their entire family on the employee list, from their son and daughters to cousins and grandchildren.

Their son, Jim Johann, has worked at the bakery for 15 years. He said he's made at least 500 wedding cakes during his Bake-Rite career for second- and third-generation customers.

He said that the family decided to keep the sale of the business

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Business A-B

Bake-Rite Bakery

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somewhat quiet, though it had been for sale for about a year.

"We love our customers, and we'll miss them," he said, "but we wanted to keep this sort of private."

Ann agreed, adding that customers had come into the bakery throughout the day Wednesday feeling emotional, some of them crying. "I knew there would be sad people, but I didn't realize it would be this much," she said.

"We would like all our customers to know... that we think about them more as friends than customers. We made a lot of friends through this business."

Customers who are looking for something tasty to snack on, however, will still be able to visit the same location and receive a treat. Nina's Kitchen, a bakery that will sell traditional Russian baked goods and pastries, is expected to open sometime next month.

Antonina Kraineva is co-owner of the business with her brother-in-law, Nathan Ibragimchayev. The family, including Kraineva's sister and Ibragimchayev's wife, Anna, reside in Santa Cruz and immigrated from Russia seven years ago.

"I think it will be a very exciting, new experience for us," said Kraineva, who has worked with her family for the past four years touring farmers' markets throughout the northern and central regions of the state selling their goods.

Their products, she said, will be vegetarian and low in fat, including non-fat goods and food digestible for diabetics. Their foods will include pastries and fresh bread daily, including pirozhaki, a traditional Russian pastry that Kraineva described as a stuffed pie.

"It will truly be something that Watsonville doesn't have now," said James H. Roberts, broker for the sale. However, he added, the new owners "want to continue the same tradition that Bake-Rite (has maintained)."

Though the items for sale will be different, Nina's Kitchen will have something in common with Bake-Rite: the shop will still be open to early-morning visitors, serving up hot coffee and tea for those who are looking to warm their bones before a long day.



Victoria Manley/Register-Pajaronian

The Johann family stands with some of their Bake-Rite Bakery employees for the last time in their shop Wednesday. From left (in back): Jim Johann, Ann Johann, Jaunita Cervantes, Charlotte Contreras, Kammie Osborn, Robert Johann, Christopher Fischer and Mary Lou Leslie. In front: Amy Fischer.