

Bakery uncertain of future

BY HOWARD LESTRUD
STAFF WRITER

The day following a devastating fire in Blooming Prairie, insurance adjusters and the Minnesota State Marshal were busy assessing the damage done to The Bakery and Sportstitch on Tuesday, Jan. 28.

Gregg Fristedt, owner of The Bakery, and Linda Klemmensen, owner of Sportstitch met with adjusters.

Fristedt was still uncertain as to whether he will rebuild and assume bakery operations. Klemmensen said she was definitely going "to set up shop" in Blooming Prairie, either at her home or at another location. "We are weighing our options," she said.

Fristedt is in his 23rd year of owning The Bakery. Klemmensen just celebrated her 25th year in the embroidery business at Sportstitch.

Both businesses catered to local customers and customers from a distance away. "Much of my business goes out the back door," Klemmensen said, explaining that much of her embroidery work is shipped to the customer.

Fristedt also delivers much of his products to paying customers. The rolls, donuts and other pastries are bragged about by every customer that crosses The Bakery doorway.

Main Street Dental schedulers report that when scheduling people for a dental appointment, many shy away from a Monday because that's when The Bakery is closed.

Becky Noble, executive director of the Blooming Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce, said the loss of The Bakery will have a definite impact on people coming to Blooming Prairie.

"Gregg had lots of customers from out of town and he also supplied product to Vandal's Family Market, to the BP Service-men's Club, to the Prairie Cafe and to the Three in One Restaurant in Hollandale," said Noble.

While watching his establishment burn, Fristedt accepted a hug from Noble and told her, "I can't make your granddaughter's birthday cake."

Klemmensen is responsible for many of the Awesome Blossom apparel designs. Much of her other embroidery work goes out of town.

Noble praised both Fristedt and Klemmensen for their dedication to their community. Many parents and grandparents brought their children and grandchildren into The Bakery to buy treats.

Noble and Klemmensen said it was ironic that last fall, both worked on a Junior Entrepreneur program involving BP Elementary school youngsters. Second grade students visited the BP City Center to learn more about the operation of a city. Following that visit, the students stopped at The Bakery for cookies.

High school and college graduations and weddings were definitely occasions where Fristedt and his professional staff shined.

"These two business owners have given so much to the community, and we need to support them now," said Noble.



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Firefighters fought a stubborn blaze for more than 14 hours on Jan. 28 in downtown Blooming Prairie. With water being sprayed on the building, a firefighter uses a tool to bust out the large windows in an effort to bring the fire under control.

Library visit suggests kids understand gravity of tragedy

BY HOWARD LESTRUD
STAFF WRITER

Kids really do understand even if they are only 2 years old.

Karen Fouarge who does day care for Per and Andrea Kvalsten's daughter Stella was just leaving the Blooming Prairie Library with Stella on

Wednesday, Jan 29 following a kids reading session.

Fourage told Stella, 2, that she could choose two books.

What did she pick?

She chose a book about a BAKER and a book about a PLANE that goes "loopy, loopy loop."

Why did Stella choose these

books? It was maybe because she was paying attention to news around her: 1) fire at the Blooming Prairie Bakery on Tuesday, Jan. 28 and 2) helicopter crash on Sunday, Jan. 26 that killed NBA legend Kobe Bryant.

Who says kids don't pay attention to what happens around them.



STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

Stella Kvalsten picked out two books at the library this past week: the first on a baker and the second on a plane.

WE'RE ALL AT A LOSS: for words FROM A2

Linda stitched everything from socks, sweatshirts, shirts, hats, and gloves! These were stitched with every kind of logo from schools, colleges, businesses, and families.

She also did screen printing on everything imaginable! I helped Linda out in her shop a few times and she is one hard working woman!

Linda is organized, and keeps good notes which are sometimes just in her head! She would make beautiful anniversary blankets, bath towels with little people names on, name tags for baptismal quilts.

She brought in her whole family to help with the over 1,000 pieces of Awesome Blossom State Football Championship apparel so everyone could show their team spirit. And, she did this with all proceeds going to the BP Quarterback Club.

Linda has made me special family t-shirts for my nieces and nephews which they enjoyed. She had many catalogs in which I have ordered can coolies, bags, pencils and other fun items for the Chamber and for Mark's racing.

She has touched the lives of

many with her special gifts of sewing, and screen printing all of which was done in her shop. She has also touched many lives with her teaching, and writing of the Junior Entrepreneur Program and as an EMT for our ambulance.

And, she was a wonderful mentor to me as the Chamber president!

Gregg and Linda, two different people, two different businesses. Both have brought to Blooming Prairie so many wonderful memories, and talents.

We do not know what the

future of the corner of Main Street will be, but until then, thank you from the bottom of our hearts to two great people for bringing so much joy to Blooming Prairie for over 50 years combined!

In my visit with Linda today, Sportstitch will be up and running soon! You cannot keep a great woman/business down!

Becky Noble is a lifelong resident of Blooming Prairie and serves as the executive director of the Blooming Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce.



Reflections
HOWARD LESTRUD

Want a mouthwatering donut or long john?

Want a professionally designed t-shirt carrying a special message?

Then, go the The Bakery and Sportstitch, two popular specialty businesses located on Main Street in Blooming Prairie.

I can still taste that wonderful date cookie, and I also wear my Awesome Blossom clothing with pride.

The Bakery is owned and operated by Gregg Fristedt. Linda Klemmensen owns Sportstitch, which will reopen soon. The future for a bakery in Blooming Prairie is still unknown.

Both of these businesses, who were neighbors, were severely damaged by an early morning fire on Tuesday, Jan. 28. The Bakery was destroyed and will likely have to be torn down. Sportstitch's building is still standing but its future is unknown.

Fristedt is in his 23rd year of running the bakery, and Klemmensen just last year celebrated 25 years with her Sportstitch business.

Here's two loyal business people who care about their community and about their

customers, many coming from outside of the Blooming Prairie community.

Judy and I sampled the talents of Fristedt and Klemmensen long before we moved here five years ago. Because of Judy's sister Cindi Hansen (Darrell) and family, we got to know how important The Bakery and Sportstitch were to their community.

One of my first interviews upon joining the Steele County Times as a writer was to visit with Fristedt. He was quick to point out that his business name was The Bakery.

A love for crispies (elephant ears) drew Fristedt to bakers school and years later in 1996, he opened The Bakery in Blooming Prairie, Fristedt told me.

Fristedt said there was no bakery in town when he opened his pastry shop in a building that was the home for several banks. The building, which carries a 345 Main West address, was built in 1875.

Fristedt, a native of Alexandria, went to bakery school in Mankato for one year, worked in Minneapolis for well known baker Cliff Myhr. He ran a bakery at Barlow Foods in Rochester and worked at Cub Foods in Rochester. From 1992 to 1996, he sold bakery supplies.

"I thought baking would be something to fall back on but I stayed with it,"



STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

The devastation was apparent on the day after the fire at The Bakery in Blooming Prairie.

Fristedt said during this interview four years ago.

The Bakery is one of the more popular Main Street attractions and is well known for its rolls and donuts. Many coffee groups have gathered daily at The Bakery.

In addition to rolls and donuts, The Bakery produces cakes, cookies, rosettes, breads, coffee cakes and buns. Three-meat and four-cheese sandwiches are popular with the regulars. Chicken salad at The Bakery is said to be the best around.

During this interview, I also learned that Fristedt's day starts at 3:30 a.m. and often spans into the afternoon at 4 p.m. or later.

Three mainstays at The Bakery have been Fristedt, Diane Jensen and Maryanne Romeo.

From this interview four years ago, I also learned from Fristedt that The Bakery's aim is to provide "fresh" and "flavorful" goods to the customer.

Fristedt has always emphasized quality and says he is his own worst critic when assessing quality of his products.

The Bakery has been a leader in preparing rosettes for the Christmas holiday. He even let me come and observe for a newspaper story the day he mentored daughter Alieshia Strand in learning how to make rosettes.

Gregg also had an order from his neighbor Linda to make rosettes for her daughter's wedding, which is Feb. 8 in Iowa. He had not begun to fill the order so some generous local residents report-

They're dedicated business owners

edly planned to make the wedding rosettes through their volunteer efforts.

Gregg was always available to help customers with their orders and often, waited on customers himself.

I also interviewed Linda Klemmensen last year on her 25th year in the Sportstitch embroidery business.

She said she loved the flexibility of being her own boss. "I can lock the doors and go pick corn with Randy (her husband)," Linda remarked to me.

If there's an Awesome Blossom shirt or hat around somewhere, it has definitely been designed by Linda Klemmensen. She calls the local sports logo business, spirit wear.

She emphasized to me that most of her products go out the back door, meaning that much of her handiwork is shipped out to customers around the world. "I couldn't make it just on spirit wear," she says.

"Our customers don't care where it comes from, they mainly care about quality at a reasonable price in a reasonable amount of time," Linda affirmed.

Linda's entire family has been involved in the business, her sons Brad and Ryan and daughter Rachel growing up with the business.

Linda's husband Randy and her mother Ardis Krejci have also been on

the Sportstitch team. Ardis has helped with trimming product, boxing it and folding shirts, Linda says.

A sign at the front of the building proclaims Sportstitch as "Your one stop logo shop." The business centers around embroidery, promotion products, creative names, screen printing and photo plates. Sportstitch also has tuxedo rental.

A nephew, Grant Krejci, suggested the name, Sportstitch when he was 14.

The business was started with a two-year embroidery machine. She is currently on her third embroidery machine, the current one being a four-head machine.

"We do a lot of fundraisers with groups; we provide the product and they market it," Linda said during her 25th anniversary interview.

The Junior Entrepreneur program is a special Blooming Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce project Linda has led for more than 20 years.

The local chamber means a lot to Linda. "It's helped me meet a ton of people and I can't thank chamber director Becky (Noble) enough," Linda says. Linda also served two years as chamber president.

In the interview, Linda told me, "The community has given me so much, I just hope to make it a better place for the next generation."