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Thursday, July 14, 2011

TREE HOUSE GLUTEN-FREE TUESDAYS

Local Bakery Offers Tasty Treats for Those with Special Diets

Santa Fe, N.M.— Tree House is kicking off a new campaign, *TGF Tuesdays*, to raise awareness of its gluten-free baked goods. Beginning July 19, the pastry shop marks every Tuesday as a “Tree House Gluten Free Tuesday” with this special offer: buy any one gluten free item available in the shop and get a second for half price. The offer applies to gluten-free breakfast and lunch entrees as well as pastries.

The display cases at Santa Fe’s Tree House Pastry Shop and Café are filled with traditional bakery favorites: cupcakes towering with buttercream swirls, chunky chocolate chip cookies chock-full of rich chocolate chips, flaky butter croissants, and spiraling cinnamon rolls. Yet some of the most appreciated items made at Tree House never make it to the shelves. Since opening in 2006, Tree House has slowly been gathering a following among “special order” customers with food allergies and other dietary restrictions.



“All of our customers make conscious food choices. They are concerned about where their food comes from and how it’s produced,” says Maria Elena Bustamante-Bernal, who opened the small, all-organic pastry shop and café five years ago, “but for many months now, the number of those who come to us with dietary restrictions—rather than preferences—has been growing. I’ll never forget the time a very happy customer with a gluten allergy said to me ‘I haven’t had a cake like this since I was kid.’ That’s really satisfying for me. To help someone get back something they remember with such fond memories is a real privilege.”

Though professionally trained with a degree in Baking and Pastry Arts from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Bustamante-Bernal’s knowledge of dietary restrictions comes from source closer to home: home. She knows first-hand the challenges for those with food allergies.

“My older brother was diagnosed with Celiac Disease as a child. He always felt left out around birthdays and Christmas. Once I started baking—even before I went to the CIA—I would always send him a box of wheat-free cookies for his birthday. It was a little thing, but I know it went a long way.”

Bustamante-Bernal’s personal experience with special diets didn’t stop at the door to the family home, nor has she ceased to learn new things in recent years. “In college, my best friend was extremely lactose intolerant. For someone who loves to bake that’s a challenge—I mean, butter is my best friend—but I did

a lot of experimentation, and over the years I've developed a base of knowledge that I can apply to a lot of different kinds of things.”

That base of knowledge, gained as a result of both professional training and personal motivation, is key to her success. “Now, we have people requesting sugar-free cakes for birthday parties or vegan cakes for wedding celebrations. With all of them, we apply the same standard of quality that we would with any of our special orders—and that standard is pretty high.”

Though demand for vegan or low-glycemic items has not been high enough to ensure these items are part of the café's regular offerings, Bustamante-Bernal says orders are increasing. Gluten-free items, however, are a different story.

“Among our special request items,” Bustamante-Bernal says, “gluten-free is far and away the most often asked for. Cakes, cupcakes, you name it, we get requests on a regular basis.”

Special orders aside, the shop makes gluten-free part of its regular offerings. “Every day,” says Bustamante-Bernal, “we have gluten-free biscotti, muffins, and scones for sale in the pastry case. We usually have cupcakes, too, though those often sell out quick.” She smiles and then adds “people really like our cupcakes.”

Bustamante-Bernal sees the gluten-free market as a potential area of growth for the business, which celebrates its fifth anniversary this month.

“We're hoping that *TGF Tuesdays* will help to get the word out about what we have to offer, as we know there's a lot of people who really have few choices when it comes to gluten-free dining—especially when it comes to baked goods,” says Bustamante-Bernal. “If we can help people get back those fond memories of childhood—or maybe introduce a few new ones—that would be a big success. Just one or two satisfied smiles. That's all it takes.” No small order, but a smile seems a simple measure for someone whose repertoire is said to include a pinch, a dash, and a smidge.

For those who set their sights a bit higher, Tree House is certain to satisfy, whether their tastes include gluten-free or not.

Tree House Gluten Free Tuesdays begin this week and continue indefinitely.

Tree House is located at 1600 Lena Street—just north of Second Street—in the Lena Street Lofts. The café is open Tuesday through Saturday 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. More information at the Tree House Web site at www.treehousepastry.com. To place special orders or to discuss how Tree House can help to satisfy cravings inspired by your own childhood call 505-474-5543.

INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

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