

Mike Pray/Jake Trummer – Friendship House

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Friendship and food. That's what a person can expect to find in a special restaurant and bakery in a pretty small town setting in a northeast Kansas community. This enterprise has also significantly expanded its catering business in the region. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Mike Pray and Jake Trummer are co-owners of the Friendship House in Wamego, Kansas. The rich history of this eating establishment goes back to the 1980s.

In 1988, an old dutch windmill was relocated into Wamego's City Park and used as a site to grind flour. The production of the stone-ground wheat flour gave birth to an idea: Why not bake the flour into a finished product for Wamego's visitors and residents? Three Wamego women purchased a house adjoining the city park to establish such a place.

Rosemary Crilly, Barbara Meinhardt, and Kathy Freeze went together to establish this business. Those three women named it Friendship House. "They were just looking for a friendly place to get together for a cup of coffee and a roll," Mike Pray said. Baked goods and tasty lunches were the key elements of their offerings.

After 11 years, the restaurant was purchased by the Feyh family which operated it for another nine years. As the Feyhs neared retirement, they announced that the Friendship House would close if no one purchased it. Mike and Margo Pray bought it in 2008.

Mike had traveled the world in an Air Force family. He came back to the Wamego area where his grandparents lived, went to K-State, and worked in the fast food industry. After he bought the Friendship House, he was joined by Jake Trummer in 2009.

Jake had grown up in a big family at the rural community of Belvue, population 205 people. Now, that's rural.

"We had a big garden and nine fruit trees," Jake said. "I loved cooking and all aspects of food," he said. Jake worked in a butcher shop and then trained under a couple of chefs. Today he is head chef and part-owner with Mike of the Friendship House in Wamego.

"I fell in love with this little town," Jake said. He and Mike have significantly expanded the business in the years since they began together.

Today, the Friendship House is open seven days a week for breakfast and lunch. A full homemade breakfast is available every day, with a brunch on Sundays from 11 to 2. On other days, the Friendship House is open 'til 3.

The goal continues to be "home cooking just like Grandma makes." Baked goods are baked every day. This includes breads, cookies, bierocks, and delicious pastries. The menu includes soups, salads, sandwiches, gourmet burgers, daily specials, kids menu, and more.

A major change at the Friendship House has been the expansion of the catering business. "We are providing home-cooked food, prepared from scratch

daily,” Jake said. “Not many caterers can provide dinner rolls that were baked fresh that day,” he said.

The Friendship House got a contract to cater K-State football and basketball events, and is doing many more events of all kinds. In 2015, they converted the outside dining area into a catering kitchen to keep up with the demand. “When I started, catering was 5 to 10 percent of our revenue, and now it is 40 to 45 percent – while our overall revenue has grown much larger too,” Jake said.

“Wamego is a wonderful community,” Mike Pray said. “They do so many activities. The pyro crew that does the Fourth of July fireworks is amazing,” he said. “Then there is the Oz Museum,” Mike said. “I have pictures of me with the munchkins who come here for Oztoberfest,” he said. “People here really support you,” he said. “It’s like a family.”

For more information, see www.friendshiphouse.biz.

Friendship and food. Those things and much more can be found at this remarkable eating establishment in Wamego. We salute Mike Pray, Jake Trummer, and all those involved with the Friendship House for making a difference with home-cooked food serving multiple communities. The goal continues to be fantastic food, fun friendships, and family feeling.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.