



ABBEY'S SUCCESS STORY

In last month's article, "Where are all the bakers?" we discussed the issues of baker training and controlling labor costs that are affecting the baking industry. Skilled bakers are in short supply and training new ones is both time consuming and expensive with the great possibility that the investment you made in someone can simply walk out the door. Doing more with less staff or growing your business and expanding your customer base are all achievable with the proper equipment for even the smallest of bakeries.

Abbey Whetzel Artisan Baker and owner of Staff Of Life Bread Co. in Virginia, was baking from her home and selling her breads at a local farmer's market each week. Abbey began having problems with her wrists and the pain was so bad that she was ready to close her business. That's when she started doing research on the Bread Baker's Guild Forum and contacted BBGA members, Bloemhof Inc., a manufacturer of artisan bakery equipment. She decided to purchase a Bloemhof 860L Bread & Roll Moulder. The 860L was designed to gently handle a wide range of dough types including high hydration and long fermentation doughs made from high protein flours. The compact size was important for two reasons; first it had to be able to be used by one person and most importantly, small enough for her father to be able to get it down the stairs to her commercial kitchen in her basement.

"We offer rustic, artisan breads with no preservatives or artificial fats, and we stone mill our own wheat flour for our grain breads." There are sourdoughs ranging from cheddar beer bread to rye with caraway seeds, plus chocolate bread and cheese breads. "Most are inspired by European breads. Our German-style rye is dense and loaded with seeds and character. There's a lot of taste and chewy goodness."

She was pleased with the results of her first bakes and began to learn that she did not need to change her hand made formulas but moulded the dough through the 860L a little earlier than when she did them by hand. The spring loaded rollers of the moulder were key in retaining the open crumb structure of her breads and was amazed with the quality of her baguettes. She was still sceptical that her dedicated customers would notice any difference in her breads when she loaded her truck for the market. Her customers did notice, remarking "how nice her breads were this week" and Abbey was taken aback that the customers liked the breads even more than the handmade ones.

Using her new moulder, "I've shaved a few hours off of my production time, and can clean up while I'm working, which is a huge benefit for me!" and was able to make more breads each week including; Kalmut, whole wheat, her popular Alpen Brot and local favourite, Olive Love bread. She had more time to try out new creations and focus on building her business. With more baking but less hand work using the 860L moulder, it has allowed her wrists to heal completely. In less than a year and despite the economic recession, Staff of Life Bread Company had outgrown her home and she was able to purchase a 1,500 square foot bakery location



"This was the first time I made baguettes with the Bloemhof."



Abbey's popular Olive Love Bread



Abbey using her 860L Bread & Roll Moulder



Abbey at work in her new bakery



Whole wheat loaves incredible oven spring

Abbey business has grown for her top quality breads, her husband quit his job and is now working full time at the bakery and they have also hired a part time staff to help them keep up with their customer's demands. She hasn't gone full retail as she enjoys the freedom of closing the bakery for half an hour to pick up the kids or make errands. The Farmer's Market season is in full swing and Abbey has bought more equipment including a divider/rounder, another mixer and a larger oven. She has begun to test market more products and finds that she can make rolls efficiently with her divider and moulding them in the Bloemhof 860L Bread & Roll Moulder. "The folks at Bloemhof suggested baking a rosemary breadstick. I decided to try making my own version and they were a HIT this year. My sales were up 14%, due largely to breadsticks!"

Update: I wanted to tell you a story of what happened in the bakery late last year and how the Bloemhof proved itself more valuable than ever.

I was mixing up a batch of dough in one of my mixers, the older model without a cage and I leaned over to scoop it up from the bottom when I accidentally turned the mixer on. My left hand was hit one time with the dough hook although nothing was broken, my hand was swollen and bruised and terribly painful. To close up shop while I healed was not an option, but there was no one to take my place in the bakery. So I figured out a way to make things work: I could use my right hand to do a few things - adding ingredients to the bowl, scaling dough, and scoring - and my husband would take care of all the lifting of bowls and tubs, turning the dough, and running the Bloemhof. I was afraid that the loaves would look different since I wasn't the one running the Bloemhof, but they still turned out just as beautiful as before. My hand is now just fine again, and the transition from me running the Bloemhof to Mike and then back to me again was seamless.

Abbey

There have been many twists and turns from her humble beginnings but the pivotal decision to embrace labor saving equipment not only saved her wrists but allowed her to pursue her passion for making great bread.

Bloemhof Inc. has long been committed to bringing you the highest quality bakery equipment at competitive prices. We have been designing and manufacturing bakery equipment since 1960 and have an excellent reputation worldwide. Our equipment is favoured by artisan bakers, small to intermediate wholesale, retail, franchise, in-store bakeries as well as restaurant and hotel operations.



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Bloemhof Inc. 74 MacDonald St., Kirkland, Quebec, Canada H9J 3Z7 info@bloemhof.com 1-514-505-3922

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