

## Giving Back to the Community

### Daily Bread Bakery

BY CHRIS TEBBETS

If Alice had walked into Starbuck's one day and passed through their looking glass, she might have ended up at Daily Bread in Richmond. It's the same—fresh made pastries; aproned employees, from the multiply pierced to the matronly, behind the counter; coffee brewing; folks clustered around tables for long stretches of time—but it's also different. Everyone seems to know each other. Nothing looks mass produced. And you're not likely to find Daily Bread's prosage pizza or crunchy granola brand of homey atmosphere anywhere near Starbuck's.

Betsy Bott, aka "Head Bread", opened Daily Bread as a shop nineteen years and ten months ago. With their twentieth birthday party coming up this spring, plans are to expand the current dining room into the rest of the building's first floor. "People will

While Daily Bread isn't the kind of place for official mission statements, Bott can readily discuss some of her own guiding principles. Her first thoughts on the subject center on the combination of quality product and "as many locally produced ingredients as possible."

**OITM:** Why is it important to buy locally?

**Betsy Bott:** I believe very thoroughly that it's one of the biggest things that we're going to have to face in the recent to not so distant future: food supply. It's crazy that almost of all our food travels at least 1200 miles to get to us. We're ruining the agriculture in California and Florida and Arizona by irrigating and salinification and exhausting the soil. And at some point we're going to realize that we really need to feed ourselves from closer by. Also it's healthier. You get fresher produce; you can have a conversation with a farmer about what it is or what it isn't.



Betsy Bott, proprietor of the bakery, and The Daily Bread Bakery Blues Band at the 1998 Fourth of July parade in Richmond.

**Betsy Bott:** (Long pause.) Support the philosophy behind it. One person went out and started her own business called, the Pizza Genie. To me that's like a big success story of somebody who actually worked here, saw that yes, one person can make a difference and do a business....So she's really taken off and flown with it, and that's been a real sight to me....To see that you can start off really small and grow

Everybody has something to offer.

**OITM:** So why do things this way? What do you get out of it?

**Betsy Bott:** Well I feel like I'm not raping the land, or I'm not exploiting people or exploiting the system. I try to be really honest. A lot of people say I'm stupid for being honest. I can save tax money if I didn't record all that cash that came in. But it's

years are great, some years aren't so great; some years everybody goes and spends their money at Hannaford and then they come back....You get all uptight about it, or plan, plan, plan, plan, and then it doesn't come out the way you planned it—so all you did was waste a bunch of time and anxiety and end up being sick or something. It's sort of an existential thing (laughter).



Behind the scenes in the fragrant kitchen of Daily Bread Bakery.

have to come in the front door now. That will be different," says Bott with a laugh.

People have been coming in the back door more than willingly since 1979. Daily Bread has proven itself a local institution—certainly for its product, but also as its own kind of community based organization and gathering place. Some of their philanthropy has included donations of product and services for Outright Vermont, Vermont CARES, Women's Rape Crisis Center, Women's Health Center and others. They also plan to re-mount their Local Legends series, offering a space where local acoustic musicians can be featured and, given a crowd, make a few bucks from the door.

**OITM:** You didn't mention the local economy as a factor. Is that a deliberate omission?

**Betsy Bott:** That's part of it too. If we can keep our money locally circulating then we also help the whole local economy, not only our own.

The other thing is providing a humanitarian workplace for people, where people's politics and personhood is respected no matter what their beliefs are, or dress, or sexual orientation. I don't expect people to hide that kind of the thing when they work here. It's really important to me that we express the diversity of the community.

**OITM:** Besides coming in and patronizing the store, what can people do to support Daily Bread?

and evolve as a business. You don't have to buy everything new, go into a tremendous amount of debt. If you have an idea, start with the idea and see where it takes you. I think that's been a big lesson for me.

Also to see that you can trust your workers; you don't have to have an adversarial relationship with people who are your employees. I very much value the opinion of my employees whether they're sixteen or sixty.

**OITM:** So is it fair to say that part of your answer is "by doing business oneself in a conscientious manner?"

**Betsy Bott:** Yes, and in a way that values every individual, no matter what their background, their skills, their orientation, whatever it is.

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never worked for me to figure out how to lie, and then make sure you have the paper work....It's kind of weird, but I think a lot of people do business that way.

**OITM:** It sounds like it's just easier for you to do it your way.

**Betsy Bott:** Yeah. Also I think, okay we're in this system. Unless we're really going to change the system, this is what we've got. I actually have chosen to give my employees more money and taken less myself because I don't want to go over the limits where I'd end up having to put in so much to the federal government because I really don't believe a lot of what they do with our money is worthwhile.

**OITM:** Do you see a need out there for more giving back?

**Betsy Bott:** In the business community, yes. I very frequently feel like a fish out of water when I go to so-called business meetings or whatever. I feel like they're speaking a whole other language and their main thing is the bottom line. And to me the whole picture is the important thing. It's not just that number at the end or making a certain amount of money. You never can depend on the money anyway—it goes up, it goes down. Some

**OITM:** So what do you depend on? What's your constant?

**Betsy Bott:** The constant for me personally is that I really love to make bread and I love to feed people and see people networking with each other. Part of what I like about having the dining room is that people meet each other there, they talk to one another. Some play group comes in, people meet here to go skiing. There's a lot of things people come here to do besides just eat. It's not just the food. People really feel welcome. We as employees, people behind the counter, actually care a little bit more about them than just taking their money. We try to learn their names, who their kids are and that kind of stuff. Being in the same place for a long time gives you that kind of potential.

**OITM:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**Betsy Bott:** I think that the queer community, the old hippie community—there's quite a lot of a so-called alternative network in this area, for which we are very fortunate. I think that we're more of a force than a lot of the straight world recognizes. I really think that we need to support one another in our various ventures; we can be who we are and be in this world and live a good life. ▼