

Dashing through the Dough

Ludwig's Bakery whisks up German, Christmas traditions

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA



Specializing in German treats, Ludwig's Bakery has certainly "stollen" hearts in Arkadelphia.

Stollen, after all, is a German bread studded with candied fruits and nuts, and one of Ludwig's most sought-after delights at Christmastime.

Arkadelphia — the Clark County city with a population of about 10,000 and the headquarters of South Central Arkansas Electric Cooperative — might seem like an unlikely location for a German bakery. And owner Lorraine McSwain, who founded the business in March 2020, would agree.

"When we opened, all of a sudden, these Germans started coming out — from all over the place," she says with a laugh. "I had no idea there were so many Germans in the area."

Who knew so many Arkansans would be familiar with and hungry for the goodies McSwain — maiden name: Ludwig — enjoyed her whole life?

After a long restaurant career, McSwain, who relocated to Arkansas from Dallas to care for her mother, heard about a bakery that was for sale on Arkansas 7.



Ludwig's Bakery, located in downtown Arkadelphia, specializes in German baked goods.

McSwain began envisioning a business like the original Ludwig's Bakery that her German-born grandparents owned in South Dakota in the 1920s. Those are black-and-white photos of them on the wall above the entrance coffee station.

"I couldn't stop thinking about it," she says. "And, you know, it's funny how God has a way of directing you. I just said, 'If this is meant to be, every door will open for me.' And that's exactly what happened. Everything just fell right in place, and here we are."

The "amerikaner" dream

And "here we are" is now on Eighth Street in downtown Arkadelphia in a larger, more prominent location. Having outgrown its former space, Ludwig's — which handles catering, including jobs for nearby Ouachita Baptist University — relocated in August.

But McSwain knows the "spritzgeback" — or German chocolate-dipped butter almond cookie — could have crumbled a different way completely for Ludwig's. She points out, "We opened March 7, 2020. A week later, COVID, and the whole country shut down. But we made it through that year — just grab-and-go business."

The bakery's popularity is evident as weekday afternoon customers come in and study the sweets inside Ludwig's glass cases. In addition to German indulgences like an



Customers can walk in or place orders for Ludwig's baked goods, which are made from scratch and baked fresh daily.

appetizing “apfelkuchen,” or apple cake, there are plenty familiar selections, made from McSwain’s recipes, too — cinnamon rolls, poppy seed and blueberry muffins, soft ginger cookies and maple snickerdoodles. There are even some savory selections, like garlic cheddar muffins and “bierocks,” or freshly baked beef rolls. Ludwig’s Saturday brunch includes sausage gravy and biscuits and crepe-like German pancakes, which are filled with strawberries, dusted with powdered sugar and topped with whipped cream.

While we’re on the subjects of community support and German pancakes, one customer walks in with a receipt in hand and makes his way to McSwain. He’s not here to complain that he was overcharged; he’s here because he was *undercharged*. His Saturday receipt for breakfast seemed too low, so he — also a small business owner in town — has returned the following Wednesday to pay the difference and make things right.

Another key to Ludwig’s success is the care and heritage baked into every “nussecken” or “amerikaner” — that’s German nut bar or frosted cake-like cookie, respectively. Everything is made from scratch and freshly baked; there’s no surplus of “roggenbrot,” or German rye bread, in the back. If you want something like a holiday pie — everything from apple, to pumpkin to chess — call ahead to place an order.

“Growing up, mom always had something freshly baked every single day. There’s a custom in Germany called ‘kaffeeklatsch’ — every afternoon around 3 p.m., you sit down and have coffee and pastries,” McSwain says.

“So, it’s nostalgic for me.”

The family legacy continues as Michaela, McSwain’s daughter, relocated with her family from Dallas and now works at the bakery. “I couldn’t do it without her,” or her other five employees, McSwain says. Especially during the holiday season, when the bakery’s business is especially bustling.

Describing Tannenbaum time at Ludwig’s, McSwain says, “First we’re going to get a big shipment from Germany with a bunch of German chocolates and imported goods for Christmas. We’ll have ‘lebkuchen,’ which is German



Lorraine McSwain opened Ludwig’s Bakery to pay homage to her German-born grandparents.

gingerbread — it’s usually coated in chocolate and holds all kinds of goodies in it, nuts and usually crystallized ginger. It’s very good. We’ll have ‘stollen,’ which is a Christmas bread; that’s very traditional. We’ll have rum balls and ‘speculaas’ — which is a spicy cookie. We’ll have linzer cookies, which are very well-known and very German.”

Just as Arkansans appreciate McSwain’s sweets, she appreciates the sweetness she has been shown during five years in business.

McSwain says, “It’s been a really, really great experience because there are so many wonderful people that support us in the community, and it’s so much more fulfilling than I really ever thought that it could be.”

Ludwig’s Bakery is located at 105 S. Eighth St., Arkadelphia. Visit freshbakedbyludwig.com or call (870) 260-4501. The bakery is typically open from 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; holidays could affect these hours.



A “spritzgebäck” is a chocolate-dipped German butter cookie and a year-round treat at Ludwig’s.



During the pandemic, Ludwig’s grab-and-go business kept the bakery afloat. Today, customers can dine in at a new, larger location for baked goods and brunch on Saturdays.