

Restaurant Showcase

Crestline Bagel Company

By MADOLINE MARKHAM

66-B Church St.

871-4583

Monday – Friday, 6 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday, 7 a.m. – 2 p.m.

The scratch-made bagels at Crestline Bagel have become a local staple, but they also draw people from around Birmingham and the region. One man from Anniston takes five dozen bagels back home with him at a time, and requests come in to ship bagels to Mississippi, Georgia and Tennessee.

Former New Yorkers attest that Crestline has hit the mark with the taste of their bagels. Jennifer Yarbrough, who owns the restaurant with her husband, Ralph, said she has tried every bagel store in New York while visiting her sister there and brought back ideas over the years. Crestline has expanded their flavor selection—power (with dried cranberries and pecans), chocolate chip, sun-dried tomato, whole wheat everything—to that beyond what most New York shops offer, so her sister takes special flavors back to her friends at home.

Walk in their storefront any day of the week, and you can choose from 15 regular bagel varieties and 12 homemade cream cheese flavors. There are also seasonal bagels like pumpkin as well as seasonal cream cheese available. The Eggel (egg, cheddar and sausage cooked in a bagel) and Eggwich (sandwich with egg, cheese and meat) are both popular.

Each morning the restaurant serves six varieties of Higher Ground coffee, made in Birmingham. “We like supporting someone local,” Yarbrough said, “and they deliver the coffee right after the beans are roasted.”

Any time of day, seven days a week, you can see one of five trained bakers mixing, boiling and baking bagel dough—



Crestline Bagel Company owner Jennifer Yarbrough. Photo by Madoline Markham.

all made from scratch using natural ingredients. They’ve each learned the little things to watch for to perfect the dough, like how much yeast to use depending on the time of year, the texture it should be after mixing, and how buoyant it should be after boiling. Each variety is a little different depending on the particular ingredients.

The staff say they never get tired of their food because there are so many ingredients in the store. For that matter, customers can create a custom sandwich as well. Still, some people have ordered the same item, seven days a week, for seven years.

“We have created a cravable item,” Yarbrough said.

Originally opened as a Chesapeake Bagel chain in 1996, Crestline Bagel evolved into independent restaurant and has changed its bagel recipe over the years to become its own.

Yarbrough and her husband had their eye on the store long before they bought it in 2007. It was their favorite place to eat,

and she had worked as assistant manager there just after graduating from college before going into medical sales. Once a year for five years, she called former owner Thad Lepkowski asking him to sell it to her before he finally agreed.

Yarbrough said the job gives her flexibility with her two children, ages 1 and 4, whose pictures are on the walls of the restaurant.

Since they started running the shop, the Yarbroughs have expanded the lunch menu. I tried the Magic City BLT with the baked potato salad, which does taste exactly like a cold version of a decadent loaded potato. One of Yarbrough’s favorites is the Pesto Chicken Pizza Bagel with grilled chicken, roasted red peppers, goat cheese and pesto. Like any good lunch place, they make chicken and egg salads and pimiento cheese. There are also vegetarian options like the Roasted Veggie sandwich.

Their meats come from Boar’s Head, and Deitz and Watson. During the summer, they get tomatoes from Green Acres in

Irondale, and Yarbrough sometimes brings cucumbers or blackberries for cream cheese from her garden at home.

The staff is always experimenting with sandwich combinations, and customers can request their choice of available ingredients on a variety of bagels and breads, including house made sourdough. “If you can think of it, it’s been ordered before,” Yarbrough said. She even recalled one request for a pizza bagel on chocolate chip.

While preparing the menu for Yolo Dessert Bar, now open in Colonial Brookwood Village and in Mobile, the owners used the bagel store as a test kitchen for the desserts, particularly the cupcakes they now sell both at Yolo and Crestline.

At the end of each day, they donate all of our leftover bagels to The Daily Bread, an outreach program in conjunction with Canterbury Methodist Church.

What’s next for the bagel business? Crestline is getting a Panini sandwich press and developing a 300-calorie menu. They are experimenting with a cinnamon crunch and cheese varieties, which Yarbrough said is trickier with their from-scratch boil and bake method.



Magic City BLT on an everything bagel served with loaded potato salad. Photo by Madoline Markham.