

Feeding The Soul, The Community

June 9

- New Erwin restaurant providing income, skills to those in recovery.

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Of The Record Staff

The next time you're hungry and in the area of Erwin, stop into the Community Cafe on East H Street.

Whether you're craving cold food like a salad or sandwich, or you're yearning for something steaming off the grill, the newly- opened restaurant will prepare just what you're looking for.

Community Cafe, 121 E. H St., Erwin, offers a 40-item menu. On that new and changing menu, Community Cafe offers all-day breakfast, appetizers, soups and salads, side items, sandwiches, a kids menu, beverages and desserts.

Its most popular items are the Phill-Up and JK's Western Melt. Both are less than \$8, the Phill-Up is a juicy double cheeseburger topped with lettuce, tomato, onion rings, bacon, mayo, mustard and ketchup. JK's Midwest Melt is the Community Cafe's version of a grilled Philly cheesesteak loaded with onions, peppers, mushrooms and smothered with provolone on a hoagie roll.

Customers also enjoy the allday breakfast option and homemade soups.

The Community Cafe officially opened in Erwin June 1, after around four months of planning and work.

The restaurant is operated by **See Restaurant, Page 14**

The new Erwin restaurant, the Community Cafe, offers rehabilitative skill building to those in recovery. The Community Cafe staff, from

left, Lead Cook Dominique Shivers, Facility Manager Janet Wilkie, Front of the House Manager Amanda Hooper and Manager/Chef Jerry Knutson stand in front of the front counter of the cafe which opened June 1. Below, a customer's favorite dish, the JKs Midwest Melt, served hot and fresh in minutes at the restaurant located at 121 E. H St.

**Daily Record Photo/Shawn Savarese Restaurant
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individuals in recovery. It is also a platform and training ground that Recovery Connection Community has created for those in recovery to be able to learn culinary arts and how to run a restaurant.

Recovery Connections Community is a recovery-oriented system of care that provides various levels of service to persons recovering from substance abuse and addictions. The program emphasis is on building community, rebuilding healthy relationships, developing a strong sense of self, productive habits and a foundation of life skills to promote long-lasting recovery. This is accomplished through peer role modeling and substance abuse education, a connection to community support resources, animal therapy and a focus on aftercare and nurturing relationships with others.

There are two locations, a 25-person community in Black Mountain and a 23-person, 200-acre farm in Angier. Recovery Connections Community was started by Jennifer Warren, CEO, and Operations Director Phillip Warren.

Manager and Chef Jerry Knutson is in the 18th month of a 24-month therapeutic program with Recovery Connections Community.

He has years of experience as a chef, cooking in Florida restaurants and at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville.

He said the cafe held a soft opening May 29 for friends and supporters, testing out the menu and officially opened last Thursday.

“Sales are picking up every day,” Chef Knutson said. “Since we opened, the community has been really receptive ... extremely receptive.”

That is evident when visiting the restaurant during the lunch hour; more than 10 customers were in the restaurant yesterday at noon.

“It’s awesome,” said Erwin resident and Harnett County EMS Administration Assistant Chief West Barefoot, “The food’s good and the people are great.”

His wife, Abby Barefoot, lifted their 3-month-old daughter, Emma Grace, while holding the hand of their 3-year-old daughter, Alivia Gail.

“We enjoy the quaint atmosphere, home-style food and affordable prices,” Mrs. Barefoot said. “This is a much needed resource for our community. So many people struggle with and are looking for recovery options. Our community needs this.”

The restaurant offers a place for Recovery Connections residents to earn their keep, through daily contractual work. They are able to make a living wage to help pay for the housing expenses on the farm, like utilities, food and rent. Many residents work at other locations within the Harnett County community with that same purpose.

“It teaches them to have a job and to work, so they can move forward,” Community Cafe Facility Manager Janet Wilkie said.

Restaurant management and staff is excited to work in the newly-renovated location on East H Street.

Chef Knutson said that Recovery Connections Operations Manager and Erwin-native Phillip Warren had been searching for a restaurant location in the Black Mountain area for some time before the Erwin building became available “out of the blue.” The building’s owners, Michael and Nancy Jackson, have been “extremely supportive” and patient, Mr. Knutson said. The chef added that after speaking with Erwin Area Chamber of Commerce President Norman Avery, the restaurant may soon become a chamber member.

It's setting and achieving goals like opening the restaurant in just four months — then potentially joining the chamber — that truly motivate the staff of Community Cafe.

They also motivate each other.

“We had this in the front of our mind, that we were going to do this,” Mr. Knutson said.

“We eat, sleep and breathe recovery,” Front of the House Manager Amanda Hooper said.

“It's a beautiful thing, to see 50 men and women working toward the same goal — to stay clean,” she said.

Community Cafe staff and management is not taking this opportunity for granted, as they work to master a 40-item menu that features fresh pastries and desserts.

They are investing their time, effort and energy to feed local families and it's paying off by making connections in the community.

“Since we opened, the community has been really receptive, extremely receptive,” Mr. Knutson said. “The community has been incredibly supportive.”

“We're cooking what the community wants to eat,” he said. “Biscuits and gravy, omelets and eggs — country breakfast at a good price.”

He went on to mention homemade soups, fried cheese and pickles, cakes, cobblers and scratchmade sandwiches on the go.

At high noon yesterday, three Lowe's employees were finishing up a Reuben sandwich, a mushroom burger and a couple of Brightleaf hot dogs, all the way.

Katita Garcia of Roseboro took two of her colleagues on her fourth trip to the cafe and they all loved it.

Ms. Garcia said the staff has been understanding of her diet and works with her unique meal requests.

Juanita Chavis of Erwin had the Reuben, calling it “delicious” and cheap, at \$7. And on her first visit, Marie Walker of Coats had two hot dogs and said they were good.

The Community Cafe is open 6 a.m. until 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Sundays.

For more information about the Recovery Connections Community, contact (828) 768-4424 or visit www.recoveryconnectionscommunity.com.

