

The Button-Down Café: Home cooking creates a hub at Hathaway

BY MICHELLE TROUTMAN
Correspondent

The Button-Down Café adds sizzle to the once dormant Hathaway shirt factory building, serving breakfast and lunch made fresh daily Monday through Saturday. Maureen Kibler opened the café with her husband, Glenn, at The Hathaway Creative Center in February. Part of the former Lockwood cotton mill complex, the 230,000 square-foot building also houses custom home decor and gift shop Unique Designs, corporate offices for

MaineGeneral, HealthReach, TD Insurance, Nalco and large-print publisher Thorn-dike Press, alongside upscale apartments.

Kibler grew up in Chicago where her paternal Italian grandmother, Rose, inspired her inside and outside of the kitchen.

"You never knew what was going to be on the pizza or in the soup. Nothing got wasted," said Kibler. "What I learned from her was not to be afraid to try new things. Don't worry if you fail at something, because you know what? You're going to



Photo by Michelle Troutman

DECOR: Maureen Kibler's display of hammered aluminum kitchenware and old Hathaway Shirt Factory advertisements on the back wall of the café.

use the things you failed at to get creative."

The Kiblers' previous culinary business adventure involved making and marketing Piquant Sauce. "Mrs. K," as she likes to be known, created the tangy barbecue sauce and marinade while tossing fruits and spices into a blender.

Kibler said that they couldn't keep up with the demand while also working full-time, and they eventually hired a commercial kitchen to produce it.

"At that point in my life, I wasn't smart enough to know

that you don't know what you don't know," she said. "We just kind of realized we were a little out of our element with it."

Kibler has rebounded, and learned from these experiences, and with her skills and those of her staff of five — including assistant manager, Samantha Gagne, and kitchen manager and lead cook, Karen Andre — they have assembled the ingredients for success.

"We read a lot on Facebook that there's a wonderful staff and great customer service.

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Button-Down

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That's true," she said. "The homemade food is mouth wateringly good, too."

The breakfast menu features eggs, pancakes, toast, bagels, muffins and breakfast sandwiches and wraps. Lunches include deli sandwiches, soups, salads, garden burgers and daily specials. "Grab and go" items, such as coffee and fresh baked goods, are available all day.

Popular menu items include meatloaf, the Thanksgiving Turkey Wrap, Creamy Mushroom Soup and homemade whoopie pies.

The whoopie pie recipe came from a dear friend who later died in a tragic accident, Kibler said. "We think of her every time we bake them."

Kibler said she and her crew prepare them from scratch, without baking them or freezing them ahead of time.

"We've got customers who will come in and buy four to six at a time," she said.

The Café seats 28 and, if their success holds, Kibler will consider opening on Sundays and expanding to accommodate take-home din-

ners and larger scale catering.

In April, Kibler hosted an event to honor former Hathaway workers at The Button-Down Café, which Kibler named for a popular type of shirt they once made.

According to Kibler, about 50 people showed up to celebrate and to share their memories and their memorabilia. Kibler pays homage to them with a display of framed Hathaway ads arranged among hammered aluminum kitchenware. She plans to add some of the items the former workers gave her, such as company newsletters, photos of company outings and an old Hathaway ad folded into the shape of a shirt.

The company's classic "Man in the Hathaway Shirt" ad, created by New York advertising executive David Ogilvy in 1951, featured a man with a patch over one eye wearing a shirt, projecting an image of sophistication and mystique.

"Karen worked here. People who work upstairs worked here — it was everywhere in the community," Kibler said of the factory.

Kibler now uses her chapter of its history to make new memories and add to the Creative Center's sense of community. After moving into the former Maynard's Chocolates space

and knowing few people, Kibler feels she has formed a bond with the building's tenants.

"They welcomed us warmly and share their stories with us. They bring in pictures of their families, their pets," Kibler said. "People stop in to chat — that's what's different about The Button-Down Café. It's more than getting a sandwich; it's having a visit."

The café also regularly serves several local church groups. After a circle of ladies sang a hymn to her in French, Kibler said, "I couldn't keep tears from streaming down my face. It was so beautiful. I was like, 'Oh, my word.' I was moved."

"I tell them stories of my growing up years as a Catholic and it makes them laugh. You develop relationships. That's the best part. I've done a lot of things in my life, and this is the most fun ever. I wouldn't have dreamed it could be like this — it's really something."

The Button-Down Café at 10 Water Street is open from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Meal service ends at 2:30 p.m.) Monday through Friday and from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Saturday. For daily menu specials and other information, visit the Facebook page, or call 616-0003. The café accepts cash, checks, and all major credit cards.



Photo by The Button-Down Café
CREW: From left, Assistant Manager Samantha Gagne, Button-Down Café owner Maureen Kibler and Kitchen Manager Karen Andre.

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