

Fresh Prep moving, Original Sin shifting to catering, Mission Hill Creamery to stay

By JONDI GUMZ

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SANTA CRUZ -- Three locally owned food purveyors at the Culinary Center of Santa Cruz are splitting up.

Jody Lombardo is moving Fresh Prep Kitchens Dec. 18 after more than five years downtown and reopening Jan. 5 at the Sash Mill at 303 Potrero St.

Tanya DeCell, owner and executive chef at Original Sin Bakery Cafe, said she will close the cafe Sunday at day's end and move to a commercial kitchen, focusing on catering and wholesale customers.

Dave Kumec, who opened Mission Hill Creamery in August, plans to stay at the center at 504A Front St. With his wholesale business growing, he wants to open a facility to make larger batches of his organic ice cream.

"We are moving to a smaller kitchen," said Lombardo, who started the business with her mother, Judy Johnson.

When they moved Fresh Prep downtown from the Harvey West area, the idea was to give people a place to assemble their own meals with fresh ingredients to take home. Today those assemble-it-yourself meals comprise only 8 percent of the overall business; instead customers want to pick up meals already made.

"Essentially Fresh Prep Kitchens will remain the same as it always has been, but without the self-assembly option," Lombardo said. "We will be able to focus and grow on what works best for us, which is pick-up, delivery and fundraising distribution to our customers."

She will rent kitchen space from Kathryn Lukas, owner of Farmhouse Culture, which specializes in small batches of sauerkraut.

They'll be neighbors with the 30-year-old Pacific Cookie Co., 3-year-old Uncommon Brewers, and two businesses that opened this year, Bavarian Pretzelworks, producing organic soft pretzels, and Pizza Gypsy, a mobile catering service offering artisan pizza baked in a wood-fired oven.

"It's interesting what's happening at the Sash Mill," said Lukas, noting there is talk about an outdoor food event in the courtyard.

For DeCell, it's the second time she's had to relocate.

She opened in 2008, then lost her lease in Pleasure Point a year ago.

"With Fresh Prep moving out so suddenly, there was no time to find another tenant or negotiate a lease with the building's owner," DeCell said. "I wasn't in a position to risk it."

After the cafe is closed, she said, customers can buy her cheesecakes at New Leaf Markets and wraps, burritos, salads and soups at the Cabrillo College Bookstore and Long Marine Lab's Seymour Discovery Center.

Mary Anne Carson, who works at Santa Cruz County Bank nearby, is a fan of Fresh Prep and Original Sin.

"I'll certainly continue to order through both businesses wherever they go," she said.

Kumec called the move "a blast out of left field" but he's worked out a deal with landlord Robert Lockwood so Mission Hill Creamery can stay.

It helps that he has his own equipment. Eventually, he would like to find a small retail spot on Pacific Avenue.

"Downtown is pretty good to me but I need more foot traffic," he said, noting the local interest in organic ice cream. "It's an affordable luxury. There was a built-in market."

Salted caramel is "the it flavor," he said, adding, "People love a good vanilla."

He also is dishing up balsamic strawberry, using balsamic vinegar from The True Olive Connection, a new store downtown.

His business is growing, and he's up to five employees, though he has competition from the Penny Ice Creamery a few blocks away.

"They're filling a different niche," he said, describing the Penny Ice flavors as exotic gourmet. "I'm more into classics with a twist."

In the past two days, he's toured several places as potential locations for a production facility.

"There is a lot of space vacant and there is a lot that fit my requirements," he said.