

## IN THE NEWS



### NowKalamazoo

News for those who live, work, and play in Kalamazoo County.

December 12, 2022

## Comfort foods so the average guy off the street could enjoy

*Kalamazoo County's first all-vegan, gluten-free, peanut-free restaurant opens in Portage.*

The menu at glofoods, which officially opens its doors Tuesday tucked into a strip mall on Westnedge Avenue in Portage, is unlike any previous restaurant in Kalamazoo County.

All of the hearty sandwiches, soups, salads, sides, deserts, and more are vegan, gluten-free, and made without any peanuts for those with allergies.

They are recipes that owner Sarah Scott cultivated as she navigated her and her kids' health needs and risks, and are now ready for the critical mass of customers as the mainstreaming of a subset of Kalamazoo's food scene continues.

At a soft opening last week, Scott flips the "open" sign over and instinctively covers her face, the sweet tears familiar to entrepreneurs spilling down her cheeks.

"It's really happening," she says, and turns back toward the brightly lit specialty diner that she and her crew have brought to life.

With dishes that may substitute certain ingredients but none of the flavors any hungry patron wants, glofoods is Kalamazoo's first full-service offering to a growing market demand. The Good Food Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank dedicated to advancing sustainable food systems, says plant-based food sales grew three times faster than overall food sales in 2021, reaching \$7.4 billion.

"Our first all-vegan restaurant is a real point of pride for Kalamazoo's growing vegan community," says Hilary Rettig, co-founder and organizer of Vegan Kalamazoo, an online resource for vegans with over 4,000 followers.

Scott announced glofoods five months ago with the launch of a Facebook page which now has more than 1,500 followers.

"I wanted my restaurant to reflect eating the foods that make you glow from within, or you know, eating the foods that make you healthy, that kind of thing," Scott says. "And then actually kind of like an afterthought, one of my favorite things to do with my kids in the summertime is to catch fireflies. So, 'glow' kind of ties them in there a little bit too."

Neither of Sarah's two sons can eat gluten, and she herself has a severe egg allergy. Buying groceries that are safe for her family to eat is costly, especially for the single mother living on a photographer's salary. Yet the consequences of not doing so are life-threatening. Sarah's family isn't alone, about 1 in 100 people worldwide live with Celiac disease. It's a serious autoimmune disease, and if gluten is consumed, the body will attack its own small intestine.

So, three years ago, Scott started Sweet Bees Bakery in Paw Paw, so her kids and others could still indulge. It has recently closed, after an equipment failure forced them to make the decision to shut down her first commercial foray into sweet tooths that have dietary restrictions. Now, the baked goods will be for sale at glofoods (lest we set off a panic).

Diners aren't confined to the salad menu here. There are comfort foods like macaroni and cheese (and other standards that typically feature cheese), twists on favorites like bagel breakfast sandwiches, and even a kids' menu. The BBQ Jackfruit Slider makes good use of this substitute. The tropical, savory Jackfruit when prepared correctly mimics chicken or pork, and this sandwich is shredded and slightly sloppy like good BBQ should be, filled with sauce, topped with spicy coleslaw all between a toasted gluten free bun. The heat and crunch from the slaw were a nice contrast.

"The comfort-food menu looks fantastic, and I'm sure many non-vegans will love it, too," Rettig says.

Scott wants to also attract those who may not typically choose a vegan meal. "I wanted to offer comfort foods so the average guy off the street could enjoy," she says. Comfort is the fitting term for glofood's mac and cheese. A sample sized cup was brimming with al dente elbow noodles and a rich and creamy vegan cheese-like sauce that boasted a deep umami flavor. The team of cooks at glofoods say the key is a balance of paprika and turmeric spice, nutritional yeast, and a blend of vegan cheese and coconut milk.

"It's been a journey for her" says John Schmitt, Senior Business Consultant at the Michigan Small Business Development Center. "Sara reached out to me through a colleague in 2021. She had this idea to create not just a gluten free bakery, but also bringing what I would call "allergy food" and vegan food, and just real good food really, but served gluten free."

What makes glofoods stand out to customers is that the strict food guidelines ensure there's no cross-contamination, and patrons who risk severe reactions can relax as they dine. "And to my knowledge," Schmitt says, "there are no other restaurants like this."