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Two new shops open beneath Derby Lofts

By Chris Cassidy
Staff writer

SALEM - They opened within weeks of each other, their storefronts separated by a street corner. They even share some of the same employees.

A tea shop and a bakery are among the two latest additions to a downtown city block that has already seen plenty of changes over the past few years.

On Central Street, the owners of A&J King Artisan Bakers hope to entice customers with the smells of freshly baked croissants, baguettes and sourdough breads. On the same block, the steaming teapots of New Civilitea on Derby Street offer an alternative to the fast-paced world of hot coffee and iced lattes.

Both are looking for help from above, namely the residents of the city's largest downtown condominium complex on the top floors. Many condo owners have paid between \$375,000 and \$500,000 for an address at Derby Lofts. And the hope is they'll make the downstairs shops part of their daily routine.

"It has built-in trade," said Lynn Potoff, who co-owns New Civilitea with Lou Ann Daly. "I have 54 luxury condos upstairs."

At New Civilitea, the menu resembles a wine list. They sell 53 varieties of tea from all over the world, both hot and cold. Prices range from \$3.80 for a cup of Earl Grey classic to \$18 for Yinzhen Silver Needle white tea, made from some of the rarest of tea leaves.

But the owners hope to add even more flavor to the shop in the next few months. They plan to showcase local artwork, bring in speakers to talk about the lore of tea and even hold motivational workshops.

"The idea is to create a different kind of tea place," co-owner Lou Ann Daly said.

But can New Civilitea convince a coffee-addicted nation to convert to tea?

"I don't know if my one tea shop can change the culture," Potoff said. "We'll take the David and Goliath approach. Hopefully we'll be able to make a name for ourselves one store at a time."

Already, City Hall has taken notice. Yesterday, Mayor Kim Driscoll paid a lunchtime visit to New Civilitea, ordering an iced Cape Cod Bog - black tea with cranberry and blackberry leaves - for \$5.30.

"It looked like she was happy going out the door," Potoff said.

At A&J King Artisan Bakers, the day starts early - 2 a.m. to be exact. That's when co-owner Andy King leaves his Topsfield home and heads toward the Central Street bakery to start mixing the doughs that will turn into ciabatta and whole-wheat bread.

He and his wife, Jackie, also offer pastries, coffee and European-style breads. Their products are baked fresh daily - they donate the leftovers to a local homeless shelter at the end of the day - and contain no preservatives.

The couple met during an internship at the Standard Baking Co. in Portland, Maine, while both were enrolled at the New England Culinary Institute.

Since opening two weeks ago, they've juggled 100-hour weeks at the bakery, all while taking care of their 15-month-old.

So far, they said, the response has been outstanding.

"We just want to be the local bakers," Andy King said. "We want you to sit and have a croissant and a cup of coffee on Saturday and relax. I don't think there's enough of that."