

Bakery grows as business expands

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SALEM — Like a batch of their own dough, A&J King Artisan Bakers is expanding.

The Central Street bakery will take over part of the area now used by Cornerstone Books, which is in the same building, and renovate its present space.

"We're getting the chance to go back and redesign it how we originally wanted to design the place," said Andy King, who owns the bakery with his wife, Jackie.

When they opened in 2006, they didn't have the means to create the larger space. The changes will give A&J more kitchen room to prepare pastries, slightly expand the retail side, and add storage for employees and a small office.

The work is under way now, but the business plans to close from Aug. 30 to Sept. 5 to complete the changes.

Though they had hoped to create a hallway connecting the bakery and Cornerstone Books, they ran into construction problems that prevent them from doing so, Andy King said.

Alex Schnip, property manager for RCG, the real estate company that manages many of the storefronts in the Derby Lofts building, said he's "thrilled that A&J King is doing so well."

"They're ready to take on an expansion," he said, "and we want to continue to work with them in the building."

King said their local success has allowed the business to grow.

"In this economy, it paid off to be a small local business with a small local following," he said.

The restaurant area will be updated with hardwood floors made of reclaimed barn board, new countertops and more cold storage for pastries.

"We're keeping that kind of rustic, recycled feeling that we have now, keeping it looking artisanal, as it were, while increasing the warmth of the place," he said.

The changes will allow A&J to expand its menu with more pastries and new sandwiches.

King is holding off saying exactly what pastries the shop will add, but generally customers can expect to see the sorts of sweets he and his staff love: fresh fruit tarts with pastry cream.

"We sit around and talk about food," King said. "What gets us excited, we make that."