

'All From Scratch'

Apprenticeship with Skamania Lodge chefs led baker to bring his talents to Bingen

By Jeanie Senior

Survey the contents of the display cases at Angel's Bakery, in the Dickey Farms Store in Bingen, and words such as "mouthwatering," "delectable" and "yummy" surely come to mind.

Every day, customers find fresh breads and rolls, pies and pastries, cheesecakes, muffins and scones, Danish, doughnuts and maple bars.

And that is a partial list on a given day.

"All from scratch," says owner and baker Jose Angel Isordia, who is the former head pastry chef at Skamania Lodge.

Two years ago, Angel left the hotel where he had worked for 17 years to open a bakery in downtown Bingen. After 18 months, he accepted an invitation to relocate to the farm store, to a space remodeled to house the bakery.

Angel liked the Bingen storefront, "but I love this place," he says.

As for his "all from scratch" motto: More than a few bakeries rely on mixes to speed the process.

"That's not what I learned," he says.

Angel makes puff pastry and pastry for Danish using the classic, time-intensive methods, plus the best quality ingredients. That means sour cream in the scones, butter in the muffins.

With a mix, "you can save maybe time and maybe money, but you may lose customers," Angel says. "You're proud of what you do because you make it from scratch."

Angel was 17, still attending high school in White Salmon, when he got a part-time kitchen job at Skamania Lodge.

"I was pretty young," he says. "I wasn't a baker at all."

The job eventually became full time, and he served what amounted to apprenticeships with



Jose Angel Isordia holds a lemon tart, made from all fresh ingredients, at Angel's Bakery in Bingen.

two chefs, including Skamania Lodge's longtime executive chef, Emmanuel Afentoulis.

"I learned from some of the best," Angel says. The first instructor was a pastry chef from San Francisco who came to work at the lodge.

"He was really tough," Angel recalls. "But I learned a lot from this guy. You had to do it his way, but I appreciated what he did."

Two years later, he was working as a baker. With Chef Afentoulis, Angel broadened his skills, learning considerably more than baking.

"He trusted me a lot," Angel says. "I learned the front line, making omelets. I was always working



Fresh loaves of bread and French pastry are standard fare at Angel's bakery.

here or there. It was pretty nice.”

When the chef took a position in the Napa Valley, Angel decided to open a bakery. He rented a building in Bingen. He and his wife, Miriam, and their four children moved from the house they had built in Carson to a place in Bingen to avoid the commute.

A baker's day begins at 3 a.m., and a 10- to 12-hour day is not unusual, Angel says—or a 60-hour week. Miriam also works in the bakery.

Angel expanded his repertoire when he opened the bakery.

“I brought in a guy from Vancouver and paid him to teach me to make Mexican pastries,” he says.

In the morning, Angel serves biscuits and gravy, breakfast sandwiches, coffee and pastries. He is

expanding the menu to include sandwiches and soup at lunch time.

Some of Dickey's customers, lured by the smell of baking bread that wafts across the parking lot, come into the store and make a beeline to the back to see if the bread is about to come out of the oven.

Several restaurants and coffee shops in Stevenson and a grocery store in Odell sell Angel's baked goods.

Angel also does special orders, including wedding cakes, birthday cakes and cakes for festive occasions. On its Facebook page, Dickey Farm has a gallery of photos of some of Angel's cakes, ranging from elegant to fanciful.

“That's what I really like to make,” he says, smiling. “Cake.” ■