

PROFILE

Specialty Bakery & Bistro

Kelowna, BC

Graduated training program a perfect recipe for bakery success

Chris Laresser thinks that new employees should spend a lot of time learning the ropes before being allowed to handle complex equipment that could cause injuries. In fact, only journeyman bakers or apprentices who have worked at Laresser's Specialty Bakery for at least a year can work with their equipment. Because of this policy, there have been no serious injuries in the 20 years the bakery has been in operation.

Specialty Bakery & Bistro in Kelowna, which Laresser co-owns, is both a wholesale and retail operation with 24 employees. They bake Danish pastries, European rye breads, cakes, petit fours, and a full line of baked products, which they sell primarily to restaurants, institutions, and a few retail stores. They also operate their own retail outlet, and have a bistro that sells breakfast, lunch, and a full line of bakery products.

With such a variety of products and services, it's no wonder that the bakery itself is a complex operation, with sophisticated and expensive equipment, much of which is imported from Europe. In their 14,000 square foot facility, Specialty Bakery has a large production area with an overhead bread line, a bun line, and rows of ovens, most of which have a steam injection feature to improve the texture of the bread. Despite the added safety features of this state-of-the-art equipment, the heat and steam present hazards to staff who are not adequately trained.

To ensure that staff members have the necessary safety training before they handle equipment that could cause injury, the bakery provides a program of gradually increasing responsibility. "All our staff are trained by the supervisor on the floor," says co-owner Chris Laresser. "Initially, their assignments do not involve using equipment at all. When they're familiar with the operation and the related terminology, they are assigned to take the equipment apart and clean it every night. By doing this, they get an understanding of how the equipment works and the hazards it presents."

Once an employee is knowledgeable about the equipment, further training is provided. "Only staff who are well trained are allowed to handle hazardous equipment," says Laresser. "Not just for the sake of safety, but also for quality assurance. When I see an employee using a piece of equipment, I know that that person has received all the necessary training."

Part of Specialty's safety program includes monthly meetings with supervisors from all areas of the operation. They discuss any safety issues, such as the cleaning routine necessary to keep the floor clear of breadcrumbs, which can make the floor as slippery as ice. Any item of concern is followed up on.

According to Laresser, safety in the bakery is mostly a matter of common sense — being careful to avoid hot or sharp objects, unplugging machines and locking out before cleaning, cleaning up broken glass — it's the little things that add up to a safe work record.

"We don't like to rush our employees into situations they aren't ready to handle," says Laresser. "It's better to take a little longer training someone and knowing that they can do the job safely, than to rush them and have them off work because of an injury." The graduated approach seems to be working for Specialty Bakery, and they have an excellent safety record to show for it.

For more information please contact the Small Business Service Centre at:

E-mail: smallbiz@wcb.bc.ca

Phone: 604 214-6912 in the Lower Mainland
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