

Wild Ember Bread

Joins Other Independent Bakeries in Garrett County, Maryland

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1 Wild Ember Bread

On Route 42, in the Market at 42 Shopping Center,
2150 Friendsville Rd., Friendsville, MD 21531

Thursdays – Fridays 11-6, Saturdays 9-1

Deep Creek Farmers Market at Garrett College,
Fridays 3-6, **Memorial Day – early October**



At the beginning of the 2020 pandemic, Omar Qazi, his wife Janine Alsalam, and their toddler son, Wilder, moved to Garrett County because everything had shut down in Washington, D.C., where they were living. They initially stayed in a vacation home that Omar's family had enjoyed for decades. They acclimated to Garrett County quickly and decided to buy a permanent home. Without really planning it, Omar and his family became part of the year-round population, and then part of the local food scene when Omar started baking and selling bread and bagels. The name of the business, Wild Ember, arose from the combination of sourdough bread, which uses wild yeast, and using a wood-fired oven. Omar also enjoys the play on his firstborn son's name.

Omar's career history includes a stint as a government GIS worker. When he was laid off, his mother-in-law gave him a book (Jim Lahey's *No Knead Method*) and a Dutch oven so that he could do some bread-making. Omar enjoyed baking and decided to train as a pastry chef; he completed an intensive program in Boulder, Colorado, a place that allowed him to indulge his love of extreme sports. On completion of the program, the school placed him in a job at Amy's Bread in New York City. Omar says that Amy's, where hundreds of hand-formed artisanal loaves are baked every day, put him "through the wringer." It was an intensive experience in mixing, shaping, and baking bread.

Wild Ember Bread owner Omar Qazi

After two years at Amy's, Omar moved back to Washington, D.C., to help open A Baked Joint, a bread-focused bakery and café. He spent five years there rising through the ranks to head baker until a serious rock-climbing accident in 2018 left him with a shattered left ankle and a broken right heel. Having been medevacked home, Omar was awaiting surgery when his first child was born prematurely. Omar became the full-time caregiver for his son for two years. When the pandemic began, the family moved to Garrett County, a place Omar had enjoyed in every season for decades. Fortunately, Janine was able to work remotely when pandemic restrictions eased.



Omar thought he would never be able to resume the physical demands of production baking; however, he has made a good recovery from his injuries. He uses compression socks when he stands for long periods of time, and he no longer engages in extreme sports, but he is now able to withstand more physical activity than he expected.

In 2022, some of the friends Omar had made in Garrett County's farm community encouraged him to apply for the first season of the Deep Creek Farmers Market at Garrett College on Friday afternoons. From the beginning, customers lined up in advance to get his bread and bagels, and he often sold everything he had brought within an hour.

Omar initially rented space at Firefly Farm's incubator kitchen for his baking. Later, he had Hearth & Timber make him a mobile wood-fired outdoor oven with some special touches: copper on the front and burnt cedar (a Japanese technique that will withstand heat) on the sides. In a process Omar enjoys, the wood is burned, then the coals are raked into an even layer on the bottom and left overnight. The next day, the ash that remains is cleared from the oven and baking begins. Bagels come first because they can bake quickly without burning in the 700-degree heat. As the oven cools, it is ready for sourdough bread and other baked goods.

In January of 2023, Omar and Janine received a call from the owners of Railey Design and Furniture, who wanted to create a community destination by having more small



Above: Brenton Hargett and Jennifer Thomas with freshly-baked bagels

Below: Brenton overseeing the heating of the wood-fired oven



Jennifer at the mixer



Brenton shaping bagels

businesses in their shopping center on the Friendsville Road (Route 42). Janine and Omar decided to take the plunge. In March 2024, after a year of renovation, Omar settled into his own storefront space, a small shop set up for baking and selling in the “Market at 42.” He continues to use the outdoor wood-fired oven, which is now supplemented by the inside ovens. He has built a great team that includes two full-time employees. Head baker Brenton Hargett, with experience in baking at a golf club in the Philadelphia area, has helped with construction and painting as well as training new staff, and leading bakes. Jennifer Thomas, who joined the staff in 2024 as a baker, has taken the lead with mixing. Wild Ember also employs part-time counter workers, who play an important role in making the place warm and welcoming.

Currently, the shop is strictly for take-out. There are some tables and chairs on the front porch of the building, but no space for eating inside. Wild Ember sells sourdough loaves, baguettes, bagels, sourdough cookies, scones, focaccia, burger buns (mostly as wholesale items for area businesses, but also to consumers on holidays like Labor Day and the

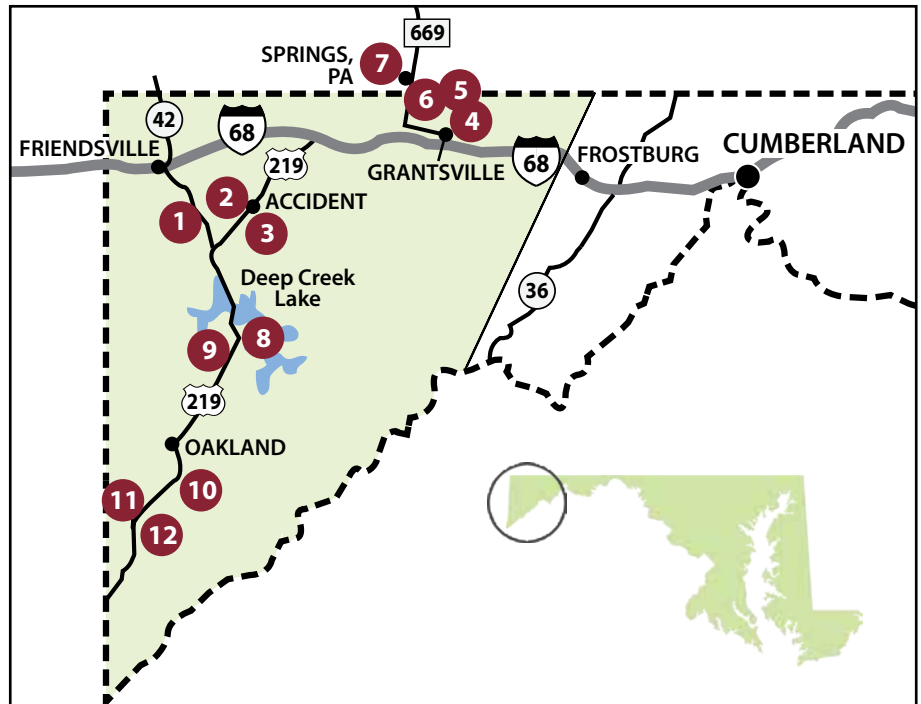
Fourth of July), and weekly cinnamon rolls. Around various holidays, the bakery also produces seasonal items such as Parker House rolls for Thanksgiving, holiday breads at Christmas, and hot cross buns for Easter.

Omar’s weeks are busy as he bakes for both the farmers market and the store. He makes monthly trips to Virginia and other places for the regional, high-quality, stone ground whole grain flours that he uses. He also spends time on necessary paperwork. Omar could sell solely at the shop, but he appreciates the enthusiastic people who come to the farmers market for his products and the newcomers who learn about his baking there, so for now he will combine the shop and the Friday afternoon market.

Omar and Janine welcomed a second son in early 2023, and they have found a community of like-minded farmers with young children in the area. The family appreciates the natural surroundings of Garrett County. Omar also has acquired a loyal group of customers who love his bread. The family seems content to put down roots here.

Looking toward the future, Omar is considering possible ways to expand his business. He’d be happy to have

someone to help manage inventory and ordering. Other ideas include increasing his bread line-up with more whole grain and rye breads, introducing some regional breads from around the world, and adding pizza and sandwiches to his shop. Since the shop and the kitchens do not have any extra space, he is brainstorming how to accommodate expanded food production. One possibility is to use a vintage trailer outside. Until he sorts this out, Omar plans to keep making excellent artisanal products, using both the ovens inside his shop and the mobile wood-fired oven he keeps outside, every week, even when it snows.



A Generous Serving of Other Independent Bakeries in the Area

In the northern part of Garrett County, in the Accident and Grantsville areas, several independently owned bakeries are in operation.

② The Rolling Pin

414 S. Main St., Accident, MD 21520
301-746-8500

Summer: Tuesday – Saturday, 7am-4pm
(Grill closes at 2pm)

Winter: Tuesday – Saturday, 7am-2pm

On the outskirts of Accident, The Rolling Pin is a popular place for hot and cold breakfasts (until 10:30am) and lunches, and for deli meats, cheeses, pickles, and salads. Sourdough bread comes from a supplier, but most other baked items are produced in-house. The bakery sells breads; pies; pizzas to finish at home; doughnuts on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays; and fresh-baked soft pretzel sticks that can be warmed. The Rolling Pin was originally located in a former bakery a few blocks away. In 2021, owners Glen and Rachel Maust moved the business to the larger building of the former Annie's Kountry Kitchen. There is a large shop area and a dining room for eating on site. There are also picnic tables outside for nice days.



3 Firefly Farms Market & Café

309 S. Main St., Accident, MD 21520
301-359-1676
Sunday – Thursday, 10am - 4pm
Friday – Saturday, 11am - 6pm

Firefly Farms was opened ten years ago by Michael W. Koch and Pablo Solanet, primarily as a cheesemaking business. The original location in Accident is now dedicated to cheesemaking, and a nearby shop, purchased in 2021, provides space for a market and café. Pablo completed training in culinary skills in 1997 and as a pastry chef in 2000. He was the original cheesemaker at Firefly Farms, he trained the current cheesemakers, and he still occasionally steps in when needed. However, his primary focus is on the market and café, and he makes special pastries for sale there. Naturally, these include goat cheese cheesecakes with his take on combining key lime pie and cheesecake as the most popular flavor, as well as



Pablo (left) with a sampling of special pastries including Key Lime Goat Cheese Cheesecake (above).

huge cookies, thick chocolate brownies, glistening fruit tarts, and the iced carrot cake that people travel long distances to buy.

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4 Penn Alps

125 Casselman Rd., Grantsville, MD 21536
301-895-5985
Summer: Daily, 11am-8pm
Winter: Monday – Thursday, 11am -7pm,
Friday – Saturday, 11am-8pm, Sunday, 11am-6pm

Penn Alps was originally opened by Alta Schrock in 1958 to help maintain traditional culture in the region and is now run by a foundation. The restaurant is located in the last log tavern remaining in use on the old National Road (Route 40), a busy portal to the west, especially in the 1840s before train lines took travelers farther. Nearby, along the Casselman River, are a 1797 grist mill and an 1813 stone bridge. The Penn Alps building, with its several additions, also houses a large gift shop that carries local crafts such as quilts and pottery, much of which come from the makers in the adjacent Spruce Forest Artisan Village. The German ancestry of many of the early settlers is reflected in the menu of the restaurant. Though there is no formal bakery shop, the kitchen produces a few popular baked goods that are for sale in the lobby. Applesauce nut bread, oatmeal cake, chocolate cake, and nutbrown pudding, a type of bread pudding, are regularly available. Other baked goods appear occasionally on the shelves.



5 Casselman Inn Restaurant & Bakery

113 Main St., Grantsville, MD 21536
301-895-5055
Monday – Saturday, 7am-8pm



The historic Casselman Inn, a former stop for travelers on the early 1800s National Highway, includes a restaurant and bakery, known for traditional breads, sweet loaves, cinnamon rolls, cookies, and pies—all made from scratch. Bread is baked every day because it is served with meals in the restaurant. Giant cinnamon rolls (twice the usual size) and apple dumplings can be ordered in the restaurant but are not stocked on the bakery shelves. Doughnuts are fried at the Casselman Inn on Fridays and Saturdays; it's a good idea to call ahead if you want a quantity because they often sell out quickly. The Casselman Bakery is also happy to fill advance orders for decorated cakes and other items. Marsha Brenneman has been with the bakery for 20 years and became manager in 2009. Owners Ben and Elissa Riegsecker bought this business in 2017 from the family of Elissa's great uncle and aunt Ivan J. and Della Miller, who had operated the inn for over 50 years. The Riegseckers opened a second location, the Casselman Café Bakery at the intersection of U.S. Route 219 and Glendale Road, in 2018.



6 Eli & Annie's Bakery

283 Zehner Rd., Grantsville, MD 21536
301-895-4210
Dawn to Dusk, which translates to about
7:30am-6pm most of the year

Amish couple Eli and Annie Yoder have operated this bakery out of a small building attached to their home since 2010. They bake in stoves fueled by compressed sawdust bricks because they do not use electricity. Their daughter Sarah is considered the expert at firing the ovens in a way that keeps the heat even. Only natural light is used except on the darkest days when mineral spirit lamps might be brought to the counter. The baked goods hark back to the region's traditions. This bakery always has shelves filled with delicious breads, pies, cookies, cinnamon rolls, nut rolls, and fry pies. Doughnuts are available Thursday through Saturday. The fry pies, flaky pastry half circles enclosing many delicious fruit fillings, are their best-selling item, and their raisin-filled cookies are also very popular.



7 Springs Store

1726 Springs Rd., Springs, PA 15562

814-662-4175

Monday – Friday, 8am-6pm

Saturday, 8am -5pm; **closed on some holidays**



Since 2017, Matt and Hannah Byler have successfully extended the long life of this general store that originally opened in 1896. Springs Store is not in Garrett County—but as a business just over the state line in Pennsylvania, it draws many customers from the Maryland side. The Springs Store stocks many kinds of merchandise, ranging from children’s toys to household supplies to deli meats and cheeses to bulk foods, but it is notable for its outstanding bakery, which Matt says accounts for one third of the store’s business. It is Hannah’s mother, Charlotte Tice, who oversees the bakery. Charlotte is joined by two full-time employees, Rosie and Sharon Kinsinger, as well as two part-time employees in the bakery. Rosie, who is the cake decorator, credits the owners with giving her ample time and supplies to practice and become proficient. The shop produces bread every day; they sell sourdough, whole wheat, white, honey oatmeal, rye, and buttermilk dill loaves; focaccia, sandwich buns, dinner rolls, and from scratch pizza crusts, assembled with cheese and toppings and frozen so customers can take them home to bake. They also make fruit pies, cakes (order ahead for decorated cakes), cupcakes, cinnamon rolls, cheesecakes (mostly sold by the slice, though whole ones are available on request and smaller cheesecakes are made for holidays such as Valentine’s Day), and jumbo stuffed cookies in several varieties including salted caramel, chocolate chunk peanut butter, and strawberry jam. Doughnuts are fried on Fridays and Saturdays; on Wednesdays, filled doughnuts are baked.

Around Deep Creek Lake and the Wisp Ski Resort in the central part of Garrett County, several small shops sell baked goods and doughnuts. One is Wild Ember Bread; two others are Deep Creek Donuts and Casselman Café Bakery, both on Garrett Highway (Route 219).

8 Deep Creek Donuts

20294 Garrett Hwy., Oakland, MD 21550

301-387-5655

Early May – Labor Day, open daily, 7am-2pm.

Other months, Friday – Sunday, 7am -2pm

Deep Creek Donuts is not, strictly speaking, a bakery, but it is a wonderful place to order doughnuts and watch them being made. The doughnuts are vanilla-flavored cake doughnuts with a wide choice of toppings. Behind glass windows, each doughnut moves from batter to finished product in minutes. As soon as the doughnuts are out of the fryer, they are dipped, sprinkled, or drizzled with the customer’s choice of glazes, sauces, and toppings. Many combinations are named for local places such as Carmel



Cove (a doughnut coated with caramel, of course). Other names, such as Smurfette (with blueberries), play on pop culture. The staff have perfected the process; orders are quickly filled. Adjoining businesses, all the inspiration of owner and entrepreneur Bill Meagher (sounds like “mayor”), sell additional treats such as popcorn, candy, and ice cream. If you like, you can enjoy your snack on the back deck overlooking scenic Deep Creek Lake.



9 Casselman Café Bakery

19595 Garrett Hwy., Oakland, MD 21550
240-442-5202
Tuesday – Saturday, 7am-3pm

The Casselman Café Bakery, located in the heart of Deep Creek Lake at the intersection of Glendale Road and Route 219, was opened in 2018 as a second restaurant and outlet for the baked goods of the Casselman Inn in Grantsville by owners Ben and Elissa Riegsecker. The Café sells pies, breads, cookies, doughnuts, and cinnamon rolls from the Casselman Inn

in Grantsville, plus some items that are not sold by the inn. These include fry pies made by Eli & Annie's Bakery near Grantsville, ham and cheese and pepperoni rolls made by the inn and baked at the café, peanut butter truffles with filling made by Eli &

Annie's and finished by the inn, and Lazy Daisy Oatmeal Cakes made by Eli & Annie's from a recipe that has been at the Casselman Inn for decades. This is a great place for a tasty hot or cold breakfast (until 10:30 AM) or lunch with salad bar, soups, and weekday specials. There are tables



inside and outside, and many menu items are easy to take away for people on the go. The Casselman Café Bakery is also a great place to pick up a fresh loaf of bread or a delicious dessert. Lil Bender,

who began by taking care of the shop's gorgeous geraniums, worked increasing part-time hours until 2020 when she became manager of the café. She can help transport special orders from the Casselman Inn if people want to pick them up at the café.

Three family-owned bakeries are clustered south of Oakland near Route 219 (Garrett Highway) between Oakland and Red House.

10 Sugar & Spice Bakery and Cheese

8672 Garrett Hwy., Oakland, MD 21550
301-334-1559
Tuesday – Saturday, 7am-3:30pm, **April – Christmas;**
Christmas – April, Wednesday – Saturday, 7:30am-3:30pm

Sisters Katie and Elsie Peachey started selling cheese and deli meat in the 1980s from the walk-out lower level of their home. In the early 1990s, they built a new building across the driveway from the house and added a bakery to the business. Thus began Sugar & Spice. They still sell deli cheese and meat and have added a few gift items such as handwoven rugs and puzzles, but they are best-known in the area for their breads, cakes, pies, apple dumplings, cookies, fudge, and



doughnuts; their pumpkin roll and pecan squares are specialties. Though they don't do fancy decorating, Sugar & Spice will happily take orders for simple cakes for special occasions.

11 Schrock's Country Store

3356 Underwood Rd., Oakland, MD 21550

301-334-3170

March – December, Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm

(deli closes at 4:30pm),

Saturday, 9am-4pm (deli closes at 3pm),

January – February, Monday, Wednesday – Saturday,
10am-4pm



The Schrocks were family farmers in the declining dairy industry. In October 2014, parents Andrew and Ruth Schrock, daughter Jennifer Weaver, and three sons Anthony, Aaron, and Joshua (who has since moved to Idaho) Schrock started a retail business that would be more stable. The Schrocks decided to stock rustic furniture made from native woods, and to diversify with bulk food sales and a deli. The result is a store crammed with an interesting array of furnishings and food. Jennifer, the principal baker, thought she would only bake bread for the deli sandwiches and a few desserts to go with the deli food. However, the demand for bakery products was stronger than expected. She now produces white and wheat bread every day, handheld pies one day a week, pretzel bites on weekdays, and hand-rolled soft pretzels on Saturdays, in addition to cakes, bars, cinnamon rolls, and other desserts on a rotating basis. The staff at Schrock's also make and sell kettle corn, a delectable mix of sweet and salty popcorn. Deli trays and baked goods can be ordered with at least 24 hours' notice.



12 Heidi's

2249 Blue Ribbon Rd., Oakland, MD 21550

240-321-5804

Tuesday – Saturday, 7am-3pm;

closed Christmas – February



Heidi, Geneva, and Jonathan Yoder, siblings in the fourth generation on their family farm (brother Kristoph, who has taken over running the farm, is currently raising the fifth generation), were interested in starting a food-related business because both Heidi and Geneva had worked in restaurants. After their cousins opened Schrock's Country Store featuring bulk foods and a deli, the Yoders decided to combine a restaurant and bakery in a retrofitted former workshop. Since the launch of Heidi's in June 2015, they have found that these two businesses work together well. People often come for a meal and take baked goods with them when they leave, or they come to pick up baked goods and decide to eat while they are there. Heidi's offers breakfast and lunch served inside or outside (weather permitting) as well as baked goods. They grind wheat and rye kernels in-house for some of their bread products. Of the several kinds of bread they sell, sourdough is the most popular. They also bake seasonal dessert loaves, cakes, pies, sweet rolls and cookies. Many reviewers praise their pepperoni rolls, a local favorite. As an unexpected bonus, customers will enjoy the animals in a nearby fenced area; these include goats, chickens—and camels! The Yoders' father, Paul, originally borrowed camels from a camel dairy farmer near Romney, WV, for a Christmas play; now camels are summer visitors to the farm.

