

15 MINUTES



High-end bunny food

When Kevin Niemeyer started working at Rabbit Hole Hay about a year ago, he had no idea how picky rabbits and guinea pigs could be when it came to what they eat. His employers—Michael and Kathryn Redman, owners of marketing/advertising/consulting company Half a Bubble Out, and Jason Krueger—had found a niche market in high-end hay that's sourced right here in Northern California. The web-based business (rabbitholehay.com), which launched about five years ago, sells hay, bedding and some chews (and will soon add pellets) to customers all over the world—directly but also through other online stores like Chewy and Amazon. And though there is no storefront, local rabbit, chinchilla and guinea pig owners regularly stop by the warehouse, located by the Jesus Center on 13th Street, to pick up their online orders. With a background in warehouse management, Niemeyer is the business' manager, though he says with a small team, they all wear many hats. He recently took the time to chat with the CN&R about the very unique local business.

Tell me about your niche.

We specialize in Timothy hay, which is grown in the high desert of Northern California. It's the preferred hay for rabbit owners, as it's high in nutrients. We're in touch with the farmers who grow it, and they send us the best of the best—then we take the bales back and grade them. Rabbits and guinea pigs are surprisingly picky. I had no clue before I started working here, how picky those little [things] are. They'll eat an electrical cord but turn their noses up at bad hay.

How's the response been?

We're really big on customer service. The end customer is the people, but really it's their pet. We get letters and pictures from pet owners. They tell us how excited [their pets] get when our particular product comes through the door—as opposed to a generic product. Evidently, they know the difference as soon as it comes in the front door. I hear that consistently. It's a whole other breed of pet—and the people who are into them are really into them. I had no idea that there were super high-end

PHOTO BY MEREDITH J. COOPER



bunnies! They're really cute, but they need high-end supplies.

Besides hay, what do you sell?

We do mostly hay, and some chew sticks—apple chew sticks, literally apple sticks off an apple tree. We sell chewable housing and bedding. They make a lot of the bedding out of willow and wicker, because they're going to chew on it.

So, business is good?

When it started, it was in a side office. Now we've got a 7,000-square-foot warehouse [near] downtown Chico. ... I sent off a 40-foot cargo container to Taipei yesterday. And I've got orders from Singapore, the Philippines People from all over the world want this Timothy hay from Northern California.

And you like your job?

This is a local business owned by local people, who are part of the community and love helping the community. It's a rare treat to really enjoy working for the people you work for. It keeps me motivated to succeed because I feel appreciated in the areas where I excel.

—MEREDITH J. COOPER
meredithc@newsreview.com

THE GOODS



by
Meredith J. Cooper

meredithc@newsreview.com

Trees and chiles

I'd driven by the new store on Main Street across from **Chico Natural Foods** a dozen times before I finally stopped to check it out. The sign on the window said "WTS"—and since it looked like lumberjack equipment inside, I thought to myself, *Maybe it's a storefront for M&S Wesley Tree Service.* I was right.

When I popped in last week, I was surprised by how much specialized equipment they have in there. The clerk told me their best-sellers are the carabiners. I don't think I've seen so many different styles in my life. "This thing looks like a weapon!" I said about a hunk of metal that resembled brass knuckles. "No," the clerk chuckled. "That's for attaching different tools to your belt." Ah ...

"When my husband, [Marc], and I drove up Skyway to see our property after the fire, I could see all the tree trucks everywhere. I cried with gratitude to see them all here," **Shuree Wesley** told me. "I felt close to a community of people that I understood was here for us and ... it made me think about the shortage we have in supplies in our local area, and so my husband and I went to work getting the store up and running."

NEIGHBORLY LOVE Speaking of that strip of Main Street, chef **Ann Leon**, of **Leon Bistro**, competed on an episode of *Guy's Grocery Games* filmed Nov. 14, as the Camp Fire raged. Leon competed against three other accomplished chefs, all of them hoping to donate their winnings to worthy causes. Leon's, naturally, was for Camp Fire recovery.

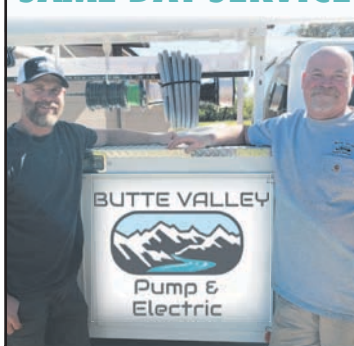
Watching Leon concoct recipes on the fly and execute them for the judges was super exciting. It's one thing to go to her classes and watch her demonstrate a time-tested recipe and quite another to see the chef under pressure. I'm told her chile relleno she made on the show will be a special on the menu when she reopens after vacation July 10. Check it out on the Food Network.

COMFORT FOOD I had an opportunity last week to sit down for the Camp Fire community dinner held at **Paradise Alliance Church** each Thursday. What an event! Hundreds of people were in attendance, with lines out the gym door and around the corner. I asked a woman, standing at the end of the buffet line, who had prepared the food. She said the church members did most of it, but that she and her husband made the main event: chili.

Turns out I was chatting with **Kathy Macias**, who with her husband, **Manny**, had owned **Manny's Chile Bowl**. They retired 20 years ago, but the community has not lost its appetite for their cooking. I had to taste it—and it was divine. The flavor was robust, with tender chunks of ground beef, beans and, of course, plenty of chiles. No wonder there were lines!

CIAO Two local Italian restaurants called it quits this past week, with almost no warning. So long, **Panighetti's Eatery** and **Pete's Restaurant and Brewhouse**. I have it on good authority that **Casa de Paradiso**, which lost its home on the Ridge days before its 25th anniversary, will be taking over the latter.

SAME DAY SERVICE



(530) 826-6931

LICENSE #1026898

Your plumbing
**Fixed Right,
Right Now!**



343-0330



CHICO CAT COALITION



CELEBRATING 22 YEARS OF SAVING CATS!
WE STARTED BY RESCUING FERALS IN BIDWELL PARK,
CURRENTLY REHOMING SURRENDERED CATS AND
HELPING OUR PARADISE COMMUNITY REUNITE WITH THEIR LOVED CATS.

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS & A **SHELTER MANAGER** TO COUNTINE
SERVING CHICO. CONTACT US TO VOLUNTEER, MAKE A DONATION
OR HOW YOU CAN HELP THESE CATS FIND THEIR FUREVER HOMES.

530-894-1365 chicocatcoalition@gmail.com

SAVE THE DATE: MOONLIGHT MEOWS SATURDAY, OCT 26 2019
OUR BIGGEST ANNUAL FUNDRAISER DINNER & RAFFLE