



PHOTO BY MAXFIELD MORRIS

Baking with purpose

Pamela Cohen stays busy. Four days a week, she's working as a lawyer at Disability Rights California—and the rest of the week is jam-packed. She volunteers as one of the musical leaders of Team Davis, an organization that sponsors activities for people with disabilities. Cohen is also an avid baker, an interest that comes in handy in her other job: **executive director of Purple Tree Café**, a Davis nonprofit that employs local people with disabilities.

Currently the "café" consists of a coffee cart selling java and baked goods at Davis farmers markets, but the goal is to eventually open a brick-and-mortar location. The mission is to provide community-based employment for people with disabilities and to bring people with and without disabilities together through music, art and community—eight team members are employed right now. SN&R talked with Cohen about Purple Tree Café and its future.

Are there a lot of opportunities like this for people with disabilities?

Not so much. People with disabilities often have a difficult time finding work in a setting that's integrated into the community. Often times when they do find work, it's in what we call a sheltered environment, where they're working only with other people with disabilities and not engaging with the public. ... Sometimes they're paid below minimum wage. We pay at or above minimum wage, so a competitive wage for this kind of work, and our work is integrated in the community.

When do you think the cafe could open?

So we haven't even been in operation a year yet with our coffee cart—and when I say coffee cart, I'm using that term loosely, because at the Saturday farmers market there isn't room for

our cart and we don't serve coffee. We have a table, but we call the whole thing our coffee cart operation that involves our employees baking and also serving either from a coffee cart or from a table. So I would hope in the next couple of years. I would love it to happen sooner rather than later. We're just starting to plan for it now. ... It's really going to be a matter of fundraising.

Do you have any experience in café running?

(Laughs) I don't personally, but we do have people on our team who do.

How do you find employees?

That actually has turned out to be pretty easy. Davis is a very strong city for people with disabilities, particularly developmental disabilities, but actually all kinds of disabilities. And so there are a lot of services here for people with disabilities, and so more and more people are attracted here. There are a lot of reasons why it's a great city for that. And so there are supportive employment agencies for people with different types of disabilities that have gotten to know us. Some of the employees have come from those agencies. ... It's a tight community, so it's not hard to find people who want to work at all.

Is it hard to balance having a job and also doing this?

(Laughs) Yes, I'm very busy. Between my work as a lawyer and being the executive director of Purple Tree and leading the singing group, I am busy—but I love it and have managed to work it out. The children are grown, that helps.

Do you have free time, then?

Well ... Yeah! Yeah. I'm not overly stressed or overly busy—but I am very busy. Sometimes I'm more busy than others, it depends what events are coming up. But I love what I do, so it doesn't feel difficult. □

Come to Purple Tree Café's benefit concert, 8 p.m. Saturday, April 6 at Watermelon Music in Davis, 1970 Lake Blvd. Suite 1. It features Dave Nachmanoff and the Team Davis Singers, and tickets are \$20-\$25. Get more info at purpletreecafe.org.

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