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‘Everybody said I was destined to fail’

Bakers’ Best celebrates 25th anniversary with sandwich special

By **Meghann Ackerman**
STAFF WRITER

Back in the mid-1980s, with no restaurant experience, Michael Baker decided to open a small sandwich shop in Newton Highlands. A quarter-century later, Bakers’ Best has become a Newton institution.

To celebrate its 25th anniversary, the Lincoln Street restaurant will be selling its famous turkey sandwich at the original 1984 price of \$3.49, from July 27 through Aug. 7.

“I talked to some of my friends in the industry about what I wanted to do,” Baker said. “Everybody said I was destined to fail.”

The original Bakers’ Best was in 16 Lincoln St., the current home of Indulge. Baker said he chose the Highlands for his business because of the cheap rents — he started out paying \$450 a month — and the success of Bread and Chocolate, which was down the street.

Five years in, Bakers’ Best started catering as well as serving food on Lincoln Street. After 10 years, the business outgrew its storefront and moved across the street to its current home at 27 Lincoln St.

As Bakers’ business grew, he



STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GORDON

Michael Baker, owner of Bakers’ Best, which is approaching its 25th anniversary, chats with Walter Glanton of Framingham on Tuesday morning, July 21.

saw his customers and their families expand and age, too. He’s catered baby-naming ceremonies, bar mitzvahs and now weddings for the same clients.

“People come in and say, ‘If something happens to me, I want

you to do my funeral,’” he said.

As Bakers’ Best expanded, Baker found himself involved less and less in the day-to-day operations. He’s no longer the guy who picks up turkeys from the supermarket in the morning to cook

for lunch customers.

“When it was smaller, I was involved with every part of it. It was a little homier,” he said. “With growth, you kind of have to expect that you can’t do every-

BAKERS’, page 7

FROM PAGE ONE



STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GORDON

Michael Baker, owner of Bakers' Best, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary, sits for a photo on Tuesday morning, July 21.

25 years of baking best

BAKERS', from page 1
thing. It's been such a long period of years, it's been so gradual; the adjustment is easier."

Baker said, in part, it's been easier to be less involved with the details because of the people who work with him. Over the years, Baker said he's had many long-term employees and some who have continued on in the restaurant business after leaving Bakers' Best.

Tim Ferraro started working at Bakers' Best 15 years ago as a manager. He's now the opera-

tions manager and a part owner who, like Baker, splits his time between the Newton restaurant and the 2-year old catering facility in Needham.

"If we had our druthers, we'd have probably stayed in one location. It's easier to manage," said Ferraro. "But we got too big for the neighborhood."

As the catering wing of the business grew, Bakers' catering and restaurant crews were tripping over themselves in the downstairs kitchen of Bakers' Best. Now the catering side of the

business is based out of a large kitchen on Gould Street in Needham. Some of the walk-in refrigerators are larger than the original Bakers' Best. Baker no longer has to cook a couple of turkeys at a time in the oven — a giant rack rotisserie can handle 21 at once. After a quarter-century of building his business, Baker said he's happy to still be open.

"In this industry, this is a long time to stay in business," he said. "People have been coming in and they say, 'I can't believe you're still here.'"