

Easterseals Serving Chicagoland & Greater Rockford Welcomes The Happy Apple Pie Shop as Its Newest Social Enterprise, Joining Forces with Award-Winning Culinary Artists

Aug 04, 2026



Easterseals Serving Chicagoland & Greater Rockford (ECR) is proud to announce that The Happy Apple Pie Shop in Oak Park has officially joined its family. As the transition begins, customers can continue to expect the same homemade pies, baked goods, recipes, and welcoming atmosphere they've come to love while ECR prepares for the shop's grand reopening. As part of that

exciting new chapter, ECR is partnering with two-time James Beard Award-winning chef and Prairie Grass Cafe co-owner Chef Sarah Stegner, along with Chef Michael Ciapciak of Bang Bang Pie & Biscuits, to help reimagine the beloved bakery while honoring its rich history and mission.

For nearly a decade, The Happy Apple Pie Shop has been a treasured community destination, known not only for its homemade baked goods but also for its longstanding commitment to creating job training and employment opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As Happy Apple founder and owner Michelle Mascuro prepares for retirement, ECR is honored to carry her remarkable legacy forward.

"For many years, The Happy Apple Pie Shop has been about so much more than pie," Mascuro said. "It's been a place of inclusivity, where people of all abilities have found purpose, built confidence, and are seen as an integral part of the community. I couldn't imagine a better organization than Easterseals to carry this mission forward. I know the pie shop's heart will remain the same while creating even more opportunities for employees and amazing treats for our beloved customers."

The shop will operate as an ECR social enterprise, providing individuals with disabilities and members of the broader community the opportunity to gain valuable, hands-on experience in the culinary arts, customer service, retail operations, and business management—all within an integrated workplace where people of all abilities work side by side. The model builds on ECR's experience operating HB Threads, its custom apparel and merchandise social enterprise, and extends that legacy of inclusive employment into the culinary arts.

Leading the bakery's day-to-day operations will be Margie Sprehe, who joins The Happy Apple Pie Shop as Pastry Chef and Program Manager. Sprehe will oversee the bakery's culinary operations while mentoring and training employees, helping them build valuable culinary and hospitality skills in a supportive, inclusive environment.

"We are honored to continue The Happy Apple Pie Shop's incredible legacy while expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities through meaningful employment and job training," said Sara Ray Hallman, President & CEO of Easterseals Serving Chicagoland & Greater Rockford. "This is more than a bakery—it's a place where community, purpose, and possibility come together every day."

Building on the bakery's beloved menu, through a special collaboration with The Jacques Pépin Foundation, a like-minded non-profit that supports culinary education, customers will also experience signature recipes from legendary French chef, author, and culinary educator Jacques Pépin, including his Apple Galette and Maman's Apple Tart, alongside many of the bakery's beloved classics.

ECR is also thrilled to partner with Dark Matter Coffee to enhance the café experience. In the coming months, guests will be able to enjoy handcrafted coffee and espresso beverages featuring Dark Matter Coffee and purchase Dark Matter Coffee beans in store. The collaboration will create additional workforce development opportunities, with Dark Matter Coffee providing hands-on barista training for Happy Apple employees.

This expansion strengthens ECR's presence in Oak Park, where it has proudly served families for years through its Partnering with Parents program, dedicated to connecting caregivers to community resources and support, and generously supported by the Oak Park based Collaboration for Early Childhood.

By welcoming The Happy Apple Pie Shop into its family, ECR is investing in the local community and expanding opportunities for people of all abilities to live, learn, work, and thrive. Every purchase helps support a mission that brings together exceptional baking, meaningful employment, and a more inclusive community.

Follow along on Facebook and Instagram or visit happyapplepie.com for updates on new menu offerings and other exciting announcements in the months ahead.

Together, we're baking a brighter future—one pie at a time!

About Easterseals Serving Chicagoland & Greater Rockford

Since 1936, Easterseals Serving Chicagoland & Greater Rockford has transformed the lives of early learners and individuals of all abilities through access to expert educational, family, and community support. Easterseals Serving Chicagoland & Greater Rockford is one of over 70 Easterseals affiliates nationwide.