Holiday Pies for a Purpose: The Happy Apple Pie Shop Supports Job Opportunities for People with Disabilities

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Menu items include Signature Apple Pie, Chocolate Chess Pie, plus pies created by legendary French chef Jacques Pépin. Prairie Grass Cafe co-owner Chef Sarah Stegner and Chef Michael Ciapciak of Bang Bang Pie & Biscuits are supporting the bakery's mission and reinvention.

Oak Park, IL—This holiday season, Chicago-area residents have the opportunity to purchase pies

and baked goods from a local Oak Park bakery that's making a difference in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Earlier this year, Easterseals Chicago & Rockford Regions (ECR) purchased the Happy Apple Pie Shop, a beloved bakery and social enterprise that's been a staple in the Oak Park Arts District since 2015.

At the shop, employees with disabilities gain hands-on experience in the culinary arts, customer service, and business operations. Through baking, serving customers, and supporting day-to-day operations, employees build valuable workplace skills, gain confidence, and develop greater independence.

Through Wednesday, November 18, the Happy Apple Pie Shop is accepting orders from its Thanksgiving pie menu, featuring:

- Pumpkin Pie
- Signature Apple Pie
- Pecan Pie
- Chocolate Chess Pie
- Sweet Potato Pie

Beginning December 1, the Happy Apple Pie Shop will accept orders for its December menu, including:

- Signature Apple
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Apple Cranberry Crumble

- Peppermint Chocolate Chess
- Gingerbread Cheesecake
- Mincemeat
- Quiche Lorraine
- Spinach & Gruyere Quiche

Every purchase supports an inclusive workplace where people of all abilities have opportunities to learn, work, and grow.

The shop's bakers are also learning from two celebrated Chicago-area chefs. James Beard Award-winning chef and Prairie Grass Cafe co-owner Sarah Stegner, along with Chef Michael Ciapciak of Bang Bang Pie & Biscuits, will teach the bakers how to make two desserts from legendary French chef Jacques Pépin: his Apple Galette and Maman's Apple Tart.

This collaboration is supported by the Jacques Pépin Foundation, a non-profit that supports culinary education.

"Great food has always been about more than what we put on the plate. It's about bringing people together and creating opportunities for people to learn, grow, and contribute," said **Chef Sarah Stegner**. "That's what makes the Happy Apple Pie Shop so special. I'm honored to support its mission and to share in the joy that comes from creating something delicious together."

The shop 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.

“Baking is a craft that builds confidence, connection and a real sense of accomplishment,” said **Chef Michael Ciapciak**. “I’m excited to work alongside the Happy Apple team, share what I’ve learned over the years, and help create even more opportunities for people of all abilities to develop their skills and talents.”

In Illinois, people with disabilities face an unemployment rate more than 50% higher than workers without disabilities, and many still earn subminimum wages for their work. With HB Threads and the Happy Apple Pie shop, ECR is addressing this challenge.

- **Leading up to Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season, Stegner, Ciapciak, and the shop's pastry chef, Margie Sprehe, are available for virtual or in-studio interviews to showcase their holiday pies, new Jacques Pépin desserts, and other baked goods.**

- **Reporters are also welcome to visit the shop to capture footage of bakers at work and interview staff and customers.**

In early 2027, the Happy Apple Pie Shop will host a grand reopening event after renovations.

Follow along on Facebook and Instagram or visit happyapplepie.com for updates on new menu offerings and other announcements.