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HOMECOOKING AND FAMOUS CARAMEL ROLLS AT NOOTZI'S

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By Heather Rule

Kim Byer's dad called her "Nootzi" as a kid, and the nickname stuck, eventually becoming the namesake for her restaurant, "Nootzi's on Main Café" in Dent. Byer has owned Nootzi's for 16 years, and has two daughters and three sisters working for her as well.

The Nootzi's menu is typical breakfast-and-lunch fare with eggs, bacon, toast, biscuits and gravy, omelets, burgers, chef's salads and drummy baskets. There are also pies and desserts. But the signature items come from the bakery: Caramel and frosted rolls. The prior owners of the restaurant sold the rolls, and Byer tweaked the recipe a bit to make them her own. She made them bigger, for one thing. She bakes them in a 9x13 cake pan which used to hold eight rolls and now only makes six (much bigger) rolls. She's the only one who makes the rolls, and she comes in early in order to get the job done. "Now people order dozens and dozens," Byer said.

Customers can stop by and pick up caramel rolls, or some choose to preorder rolls, which helps Byer avoid the "guessing game" of how many rolls to prepare. "I always said if I had a crystal ball that told me how many rolls to make every day, life would be great," Byer said. At any rate, Byer makes hundreds of dozens of her famous rolls for customers. Over the 2020 Fourth of July week, she made 180 dozen rolls. With the COVID-19 pandemic, Nootzi's offered curbside service in the spring and opened up again June 10. Business was down, but the demand for her famous rolls made it worth-while to be open during that time, Byer said.

The summer is the "bread and butter" for business at Nootzi's, Byer said. There are the regular, year-round customers, of course, since Nootzi's is open seven days a week for breakfast and lunch. But so many summer visitors all come back and pop in to the café as well. Byer said she's pretty good with names, too. "They love it that I can remember them," Byer said. "I always say, it's not a business, it's a family. My customers are more than customers. They're more like a family to me."

The staff makes it fun, visiting and socializing with the patrons, along with serving up meals. Tourists that come from other cities are used to visiting Nootzi's to enjoy a homecooked meal for under \$10, Byer said.

The café itself isn't anything fancy, Byer said, which people seem to enjoy. There's a coziness to it that makes customers feel like they're in a small-town café – because they are. Old pictures hang on the walls, some dating back to 1904 when the restaurant was

established, and people love to look at those photos of old cars and buildings, Byer said. "It's very low-key, and very rural," Byer said. "It's just cozy and comfortable, and I think people like that."

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