

World Traveling Chef Peter Lowe Comes Home to Aitkin

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY TRACY RITTMUELLER



The Beanery Cafe & Roastery at Gramma's Pantry

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The Beanery Cafe is open 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Sundays, 7 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturdays,
and 7 a.m.–5 p.m. weekdays.

Visit their Facebook page @theaitkinbeanery for extended hours, live music and themed dinner specials.

IN 2005, IN THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS OF PALO VERDES, ST. VINCENT, DOMINICA AND THE BAHAMAS, Chef Peter Lowe prepared meals for the cast and crew of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, and its sequel, *At World's End*. Since then, he has cooked on so many different movie sets around the country, he can't remember where he was, when.

One year he rented an apartment in Los Angeles but only spent two weeks living in it. He is still sometimes on the road with Hat Trick, a catering company with a film industry niche, but he works mainly in Aitkin now, building up an interconnected group of businesses so he can stick around for good.

Inside his newly relocated and renovated Beanery Cafe & Roastery, the original antique tin ceiling panels are painted sage and gold. Blanketed in warm light, this large, open room hums with conversation. In the kitchen, the chef prepares spicy cream of potato soup.

Lowe speaks in a low-decibel, bass voice that cuts through surrounding chatter like a sharply honed knife through a ripe tomato. He doesn't display hyper-enthusiasm or use clever slang like Guy Fieri. He does not regale listeners with witty, life-of-the-party banter like Anthony Bourdain did. He is calm. He speaks slowly like a true-blue Minnesotan.

Telling his story, he reveals a dedication to family ties and commitment to community. Asked who he would most like to have cook for him, he thinks, and then swallows before answering, "My mom."

The call to invest his talents in Aitkin came in March 2014 when Lowe and his younger sister, Brekke Lowe, inherited Gramma's Pantry, a natural food store, from their mom, Becki Jones. Jones had owned the business since 1985. She carried bulk foods, spices, and vitamins.

"She had always talked about what she wanted to do with the store... to change it," Lowe said. "But it just got to be too much for her. And then she passed away."

His sister, who has catered with him on movie sets, was living in San Diego. He was on the road full time. They thought about selling the store, but the place had been in the family for so long it was like home. So, they kept it.

In 2015 he removed the old carpet, exposing the original wood floors. He added a new counter, and brought in smoothies, cheese, and gift baskets. Over time he expanded the square footage and stocked gourmet food market items: coffee beans and teas; fresh produce, local dairy, eggs, and pork; specialty chocolate bars, sodas, and preserves; organic oils, vinegars, and juices; and a full line of essential oils.

Lowe thrives on change. In 2017 he purchased The Beanery Cafe from Amanda MacDonald. He expanded on the cafe's already fine reputation by roasting coffee and increasing food options.

In 2018 he relocated The Beanery Cafe & Roastery next door to Gramma's Pantry and opened the wall between them. He offers Live Music Nights with appetizer specials, beer, and wine. Friday night themed dinners might have a Chinese buffet on the menu, or a southern-style meal of pork belly appetizers, barbecue brisket and mashed potatoes with jalapeño, and dessert.

The Beanery's recent social media reviews are impressive. Facebook and Yelp users call it "amazing" and "awesome," and praise Friday night dinners as "unpretentious gourmet food." Google reviewers say the food is "beautifully prepared and scrumptious," the prices are "super reasonable," and Peter Lowe is "a 10-star chef."

Now he is opening a brew pub and restaurant, Block North, kitty-corner across the street. Partners in the new enterprise are brewers Rich Courtmache and Dake Olson. Food choices are unique to the Aitkin area, he said. Yes, meat, potatoes, and walleye will be on the menu, but the way he presents them is influenced by flavors and techniques he experienced in his travels.

"City food," he calls it. The walleye, for example, isn't broiled, battered or pan fried. You can get that anywhere. Instead, in a riff on fish he ate in London, it might be smoked and served with a mustard beurre blanc sauce and poached egg on top.

Lowe didn't just inherit a business from his mother, Becki Jones. He also embraced her well-known passion to help build a thriving, prosperous community. With his spouse, Amanda (MacDonald) Lowe, who is former owner of The Beanery, former executive director of Aitkin's Chamber of Commerce and now owner of Aitkin Flowers, he is making celebrity-style impact on the look and feel of downtown Aitkin. It's becoming a destination again, a great little town.

With their energy and talents, they could prosper anywhere, but for Peter and Amanda Lowe, there really is no place like home. [📍](#)



Chef Peter Lowe's Mom's Marbled Mashed Potatoes

(serves 8-10)

Peel potatoes if you prefer a smoother mash, but Chef Lowe says most of the nutrients and much of the flavor is in the peeling.

INGREDIENTS

1 pound yellow potatoes

1 pound blue potatoes

12 ounces sweet potato

(approximately 1 large)

1/2 cup butter, melted and divided

3/4 cup heavy cream (warmed)

Kosher salt

Black pepper

1. Peel away scars or "bad" spots. Cut potatoes approximately 2 inches by 2 inches, place in large kettle and cover with cold water. Add a generous pinch of kosher salt.
2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. On stove top, bring potatoes to a simmer. Cook until potatoes are tender when pierced with a knife. Drain and separate into three large bowls by color.
3. Mash sweet potatoes with one-fourth of the melted butter (2 ounces). Mash yellow potatoes with half of the warmed cream and one-quarter of the butter (2 ounces). Mash blue potatoes with remaining warmed cream and 2 ounces of butter. Reserve the remaining 2 ounces of butter.
4. Dollop the potatoes by large spoonfuls in a 11- x 7-inch oven-proof casserole dish. Create a marble pattern by dragging a butter knife through to swirl the colors together. Drizzle with reserved melted butter.
5. Brown in oven for 25–30 minutes.