

Black Panther Bakery

Bakery sits on Panther history.

by Stephanie Han

“I was a little too young to be a part of it, but I remember the breakfasts. The Black Panthers started serving breakfast for kids before the public schools started doing it,” says Kim McClure, 37, owner of It’s All Good Bakery in Oakland.

McClure’s bakery is located on Martin Luther King Jr. Way at the site of what was once the office of the Black Panther Party.

Founded by Merritt College students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the radical civil rights group became nationally known for violence and defiance as well as social justice issues it championed for African Americans in the late 1960s and early 70s.

Money for the office headquarters, which opened in 1967, was raised through the sale of Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung (Mao’s Little Red Book).

In its own way, the bakery reflects certain Black Panthers ideals: employment, opportunity and community involvement. The company regularly donates to local elementary and high schools, and hosts an annual community event that hundreds attend.

It’s All Good also provides cakes for Oakland Technical High School’s senior prom.

Pieces of cake also go to people who come on a Black Panther tour. The tours are run by David Hilliard, the Panthers former Chief of Staff who still lives in the area.

“People can enjoy the tour, learn, and they can also enjoy some good cake. It’s giving back,” McClure says. “We want to support the community. It’s our way of saying thanks.”

The breakfast program that fed McClure was one of the Panthers most lauded efforts to put socialism into practice.

And while McClure’s four-year-old business may be a symbol of the efforts of the past, he said he had no idea that his bakery was situated on such historic ground until Seale came by and told him.

The small bakery has some other well-known admirers. Its walls display pictures of celebrities like Ricky Henderson, Chris Rock, John Lee Hooker, and Patty LaBelle.

At the entrance is an exhibit that details the significance of the Panther Party. It also has clippings with stories about It’s All Good from newspapers from New York to Japan.

History aside, It’s All Good — which employs everyone from McClure’s brother Robert Lee, 29, two cousins too numerous to name — turns out pies, cakes, desserts and wedding cakes from family recipes.

“These are desserts that are in the black culture that mom and grandma used to make. You can’t get them anywhere out of the home. Things like peach cobbler or 7-Up Lemon Cake. No other bakery around here make 7-Up Lemon Cake. You know how McDonald’s is built on the burger? 7-Up Lemon Cake is what we’re built on,” says McClure.

Hilliard agrees: “I like that 7-Up Lemon Cake,” he says. “That’s my favorite. My family goes there all of the time. It’s a tradition.”

Joe Robinson, 35, head of Jenga Consulting, a software company, says, “My favorites are the sweet potato pie and the peach cobbler. My fiancé likes the chocolate cake.”

“I like taking the cakes to parties. It’s always good, and it’s not like it’s store-bought. Also, I like to support black-owned businesses. I go it out of my way actually — from a florist to an accountant to people who might work in my yard.”

McClure adds, “In order for a black business to survive we have to support each other.”

In some ways, times are not all that different from the tumultuous years in which the Black Panthers thrive. McClure says, “Drugs are the biggest problem for our community. Also, there’s nothing to do for the youth, nowhere for them to go. So they hang out on the streets... To me, the Black Panthers were about togetherness, black power and a positive influence. Even though I was little we would try to imitate them the press often says negative things, but the Black Panthers changed things.”

It’s not a surprise that Hilliard agrees: “We had an impact on American youth. We were a powerful medium and successfully organized a multicultural force. We worked and traded ideas with Asian Americans — Alex Hing, now chef at the UN was part of the Mao Red Guard. I still think young people, the hip-hop generation now, should be involved in the political process. People like Kim are part of the spirit.”

It’s All Good Bakery is located at 5622 Martin Luther Jr. Way.

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