

Just a few blocks east of the Strip, it's not hard to find Great Buns Bakery on Tropicana Avenue. The family-owned shop's scent of fresh bread and pastries gives it away long before you set foot inside. It's the kind of aroma that draws a person in and keeps their family coming back to the bakery's dual production and retail facility for generations.

Anthony Madonia Jr., son of the shop's co-founder, says his wife often comments on the bakery smell that his clothing carries when he gets home at night.

"She always says that, but it was the time I didn't smell of it that was the hardest," Madonia said. "When the bakery burned to the ground and we weren't open in 2007 and 2008, that was hard. It was something special to get that smell back again after the fire."

The blaze occurred March 20, 2007. Madonia said it was the longest night of his life.

"We had wooden trusses in the ceiling and they became super-heated," Madonia said. "I got a phone call at about 8 p.m., and I was about 30 minutes away. I got there in 10. Between the fire, smoke and water damage, though, we were done. The entire place was gone."

Seventeen months later, Great Buns was open again in a new building, and now, the 25,000 square-foot production facility and store is a bustling place. It wasn't easy, but they decided to rebuild on the same site at 3270 E. Tropicana Ave.

The majority of its business comes from its wholesale operation.

"We supply a vast majority of the hotels and casinos on and off the Strip, along with golf courses, sports bars, sandwich shops and pizza places," said Deborah Morelli, operations manager and co-owner.

"A fun thing is the relationships that develop between our employees and the purchasing agents at different restaurants and hotels."

Among the clients are Boyd Gaming, Caesars Entertainment Corp., MGM Resorts International, Golden Entertainment and Station Casinos.

During one busy afternoon at the bakery's retail store, customers contemplated over a variety of goods—breads, 32 types of dinner rolls and pastries. With the NHL playoffs approaching, there were plenty of Golden Knights-themed cookies.



These offerings are what make Great Buns well-known, even attracting regular customers from as far as Hawaii.

"We have people who drive from California," Morelli said. "We have people who take boxes with them when they fly out. We wrap them up so they can get through TSA security, but we warn them that the TSA people might want the product because they're in here often, as we're only 15 minutes from the airport."

Along with Las Vegas itself, Great Buns has grown and evolved through the years.

"When I started here in 1991, Vegas was all about the buffets," Madonia said. "It was about dinner rolls. It was a lot more simple back then, but Vegas has become so sophisticated. More money was coming into Vegas and more money

was coming here, so we had to evolve to where we now do a lot of specialty breads and artisan items. We would have never dreamed about 50 percent of the items we make today.”

With his father now in his golden years, Madonia has taken on a larger role at the bakery, which open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

“Bread has gotten more advanced,” Madonia said. “We have to make sure we’re a destination, so we’re constantly trying new things and new products.”

Whether it’s a chewy focaccia or a Dutch Crunch dinner roll, Great Buns turns out scores of fresh baked goods every day. And depending on which way the wind is blowing across the Valley, you just might get a whiff of that freshly baked bread smell.