



Dough made with bread-fruit flour is carefully formed into cookies for A Baker's Heart.

KAT WADE / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

Using flours made with island ingredients, a training program serves those in need

By Pat Gee
pgee@staradvertiser.com

The Baker's Heart company was formed not so much to indulge the public's craving for pastry, nor to turn a profit. The ulterior motive of Colin and Robin Kumabe was to create jobs for the homeless and others trying to rebuild their lives. The husband-wife team founded the Touch a Heart nonprofit in 2015 as a vocational training program in partnership with the Salvation Army, but the Kumabes had a larger picture in mind. They wanted to generate a demand for food products unique to Hawaii, and create enterprises that would provide jobs and promote the state as a whole.

They formed A Baker's Heart a year later, offering cookies, biscotti, bread, brownies and lemon bars. Most of the baked goods are available online and at two Honolulu shops.

Colin Kumabe, director of operations and training, has been using taro, breadfruit and lesser-known kiawe seed pods — local ingredients that make Baker's Heart products distinctive. Taro is in everything nowadays, Kumabe said, but ulu (breadfruit) and kiawe pods have not yet entered the mass market.

Baker's Heart makes its own ulu flour for baked goods, and also produces a taro-ulu pancake mix. In March Baker's Heart introduced ulu ice cream, which is sold at the House of Pure Aloha. Ulu flour gives products a more moist texture than wheat flour, and because it contains fruit, recipes must be adjusted for the additional sugar.

Kumabe is still experimenting with ulu flour, as well as taro and kiawe flours made by other companies, in different combinations. These flours can be used to make gluten-free products by customer request.

As important as these food products is what Touch a Heart

provides to its workers. The nonprofit evolved from the Kumabes' participation in a 2006 Pearl City Community Church project to help feed people who were homeless and camping out at public parks.

Touch a Heart trains the needy in culinary skills so that they can eventually fend for themselves, recalling the old proverb: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Their mission is reflected in the agency's tagline: "Transforming hearts one heart at a time."

While the program began with women involved in a Salvation Army treatment program, now men and clients from all service agencies can join a 12-week cooking class at a commercial kitchen at Central Union Church. The students make the food for Touch a Heart Catering service, which started in 2017, and they are paid while they learn.

"We've had 28 graduates since 2015," said Robin Kumabe, Touch a Heart's executive director. Those graduates were hired for the bakery or catering service, went on to vocational school, or found jobs outside the agency.

COLIN KUMABE, a longtime Zippy's executive until 2006, has been volunteering on behalf of people who are homeless since the late 1980s. After a trip to Haiti in 2010 to assist in earthquake recovery, he was inspired to "rethink homelessness." He marveled at how within six months of the catastrophe residents were collecting and recycling debris. "People made commerce out of junk."

Hawaii, with greater resources to build on, should be able to provide even more productive opportunities, Kumabe said. He hopes to get the community to "look at homeless people as a valuable resource versus somebody on the side of the road."

As an example, Kumabe pointed to Vince Kanai Dodge, founder of Wāianae Gold, a producer of kiawe bean pod flour. Dodge pays people who are homeless to collect pods.

One of Touch a Heart's current students, Jerome Peters, 53, was picking pods off the ground when



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JAMMI AGUIÑO / JAQUINO@STARADVERTISER.COM

**Where to find
A Baker's Heart**

BAKED GOODS

- >> **Lion Coffee Cafe:** 1555 Kalani St., 943-429
- >> **Friends Cafe:** 1400 Kapio-lani Blvd., 943-0333

ULU ICE CREAM

- >> **Uncle Clay's House of Pure Aloha:** Ala Moana Center outside Macy's; 377-6939

ORDERS

- >> **Online:** bakersheart-hawaii.org
- >> **Call:** 779-7083
- >> **For catering info:** Go to touchahearthawaii.org or email info@touchahearthawaii.org

Dodge told him about the cooking classes, where Kumabe was making use of the kiawe flour.

Peters had been living at the Waianae Boat Harbor camp for the homeless for 12 years, but finally, he said, "I got tired of being sick and tired" and left in December. He enrolled in the Salvation Army's residential treatment services program, which led him to the culinary program.

AT A COOKING class in late May, Peters proclaimed, "Today I make 153 days of sobriety!" It's an accomplishment he never thought he'd be able to claim.

Other classmates proudly started calling out the number of days they'd been recovering from drug or alcohol addiction. Most hope to find jobs in restaurants, but Peters said he wouldn't mind becoming a supermarket butcher, just to be able to point to something and say, "I made that."

B.J. Edrozo-Kekawa, marking his 108th day of being clean and sober, joined the Salvation Army's Adult Treatment Services program in January at the urging of his father and stepmother. That led to the cooking class, and a new ambition.

He'd like to work in a Waikiki hotel, he said, and is willing to start as a dishwasher, then work his way up to a cooking job. "I like cooking and learning to use the right (tools); I like that it comes from my own hands."

Colin Kumabe, left, director of operations and training for Touch a Heart, teaches B.J. Edrozo-Kekawa to make even scoops of dough. Edrozo-Kekawa is a resident of the Salvation Army's Adult Treatment Services program.