

# Cheers to our Customer: Friendship Cafe & Bakery

By Bria Felicien

Just north of Milwaukee, Wisconsin sits The Friendship Cafe & Bakery – a Toast customer with a mission to offer a welcoming place to gather and enjoy coffee and baked goods.

There, customers can grab an iced coffee, a matcha latte, or the Drink of the Month and pair it with a freshly made bagel or sandwich. The bakery makes custom desserts, plain or sweet crumble twisted and braided loaves, and even cake pops.

Any purchase at the coffee shop supports the mission of The Friendship Circle of Wisconsin – the nonprofit that runs the cafe and bakery – which is to create friendship in the lives of individuals with special needs and those facing isolation while providing an opportunity to participate in the community.

The Friendship Circle provides social, educational, vocational, and mental health programming to people with disabilities and runs The Friendship Art Studio, a place that is designed to serve as a sanctuary for artists with all abilities. The nonprofit also offers inclusion training programs to schools and businesses.

The Slice spoke with Levi Stein, Executive Director, of The Friendship Circle of Wisconsin. He started volunteering with The Friendship Circle of Michigan in Detroit in the late 1990s and ran Friendship Circle in Puerto Rico before relocating near Milwaukee.

## "Our main ingredient is friendship"

Stein said. "We try to serve friendship on the golden platter every day to everyone and instill that your support is making a difference in the lives of children and adults with disabilities. And we appreciate your support."

The cafe opened over two years ago, and all of the proceeds have gone towards creating job opportunities for people with disabilities. Stein considers the cafe a platform to offer adults with disabilities, employment training and a job that can further develop and sharpen their skills.



The Friendship Cafe & bakery offers freshly made bagels, custom desserts, and pastries Sunday through Friday.



The Friendship Cafe & Bakery has used Toast since the establishment opened, after being referred by another Toast customer. All photos provided by Friendship Circle of Wisconsin.

According to the United Nations, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities can reach as high as 80 percent in some countries because employers assume people with disabilities are unable to work. October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is about raising awareness of disability employment issues and removing the stigma surrounding workers with disabilities.

Each day The Friendship Cafe is open for business - Sunday through Friday - the shop offers its bakery and cafe employment training, which ranges from how to make bagels and pastries to how to check out a customer on the Toast Point of Sale (POS).

"I think, when community members come in, and they see people with disabilities helping run the operation, it makes them happy, both the customer and the employees, and



Sonia, cafe manager at The Friendship Cafe & Bakery, operates the Toast Point-of-Sale.

that's why we're doing it," Stein said. "The local cafe is a setting where people from all segments of the community visit, so it's truly an inviting place that is educating and modeling to the community how to be more welcoming and inclusive."

Though they have dairy options, the main kitchen is dairy free and fully kosher with gluten-free items as well. The cafe also hosts Wednesday night dinners every week where customers can pre-order special menu items like pizza, stuffed peppers, salmon, or Shakshuka. Every few months the cafe hosts "Late Nights," and after dinner customers can stay for live music during the Saturday Night Live event.

Customers can use Toast POS or the Toast Takeout App to order a specialty drink like the Turtle Shaker or even pick up an Oatmeal cookie from the bakery - or a Friendship Scarf or Sweatshirt in the merchandise shop.

Stein said the cafe was referred to Toast by The Friendship Circle in Michigan, and they have been using the platform from the beginning to manage their business.

"I did research on a lot of platforms and I found that Toast offered more than any other system, at least at the time," Stein said. "I think the online checkout system is fairly simple, easy to use, and works well and I like that a lot. I like the hardware and the software, they're great."

Learn more about The Friendship Cafe and if you're local to Milwaukee, check out the coffee shop on Toast.