
Josh Allen

Companion Bread Company

By M. Karen Hubbard

While attending Stanford University in California, Josh Allen found a job working in a bakery and fell in love with baking and everything about it. Someone in California asked Josh to run a bakery for him, but after awhile, that bakery failed. Eventually, Josh moved back to Saint Louis, Missouri, where things started getting better.

On December 8th, 1993, at the age of 23, Josh Allen launched the Companion Baking Company with investment from his family. Josh picked the word 'Companion' because its Latin root means "the act of sharing," and Josh is all about sharing his bread with as many people as he can. His family owned a building that housed Allen Foods, the family business. They allowed Josh to take over a section of the building to create his bakery. There, he installed baking ovens made of stone which he imported from France, and he began production of artisan bread. This bread may cost more and not last as long, but it is made of all natural ingredients – no chemicals, additives, or preservatives. In 1999, the company began making real kettle boiled bagels called Sophie's Bagels, named for his young daughter, Sophie. Josh is not simply interested in baking his wonderful breads; his goal is to help people think differently about food. He hopes people will focus on natural foods and think carefully about the foods they eat.

In 2000, Josh opened a retail store for his bread in Clayton, a city just outside the City of St. Louis. During the same year, Companion Bread Company even began delivering bread to Kansas City, Missouri, seven days a week. Two years later, they opened a bakery in Kansas City to meet the demand for the company's bread there. Eventually, Josh had to close the bakery in Kansas City because he could not be there everyday like he could in St. Louis. This setback did not stop Josh's entrepreneurial spirit. By 2003, his company made \$5 million and delivered bread everyday to more than 250 wholesale customers (restaurants, country clubs, hospitals, grocery stores, etc.). He opened two more stores in the fall of 2007 in the Central West End of St. Louis and in a nearby city, Ladue. His company continues to produce up to five million pounds of bread per year. He employs about seventy-five people in the Saint Louis area. His bread is sold between Wentzville, Missouri, and Silo, Illinois. His revenue is around \$13 million in 2007. (Remember, the revenue is money earned before expenses are taken out.)

At this point, Josh plans on staying local. He is not really interested in selling his bread in new areas as much anymore. He would like to get people involved in making bread by offering classes. He is part of the Bread Bakers Guild of America which is dedicated to giving information and education regarding artisan bread making.

Josh has a motto he likes to work by: "It is all work, and it all needs to be done."