

The Village Blend latest new business to open in Sloatsburg

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Barbara Berntsen, Nicole Scanlon and Cindy-Sass Garcia have opened the Village Blend Cafe in Sloatsburg Nov. 8, 2018. Peter Carr, pcarr@lohud.com

Over the past two years, Sloatsburg's section of Route 17 has experienced quite an upgrade.

First came Seven Lakes Station, a popular taproom and beer garden that specializes in small batch brews. Then the Valley Rock Inn & Mountain Club arrived, a tucked away oasis abutting the train station parking lot that now includes guesthouses, a farmers market, bike shop, state of the art fitness center and an upcoming farm to table restaurant.



The Village Blend Cafe in Sloatsburg Nov. 8, 2018. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

About the only thing missing in this cluster of quaint was a place to get a decent cup of coffee. Until now.

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Last month, The Village Blend, a coffeehouse and café, became the newest addition to Sloatsburg's spectacular spruce up. The idea had been almost 20 years in the making for longtime residents Barbara Berntsen and her daughter Nicole Scanlon, who've owned The Blend's building since 1999.



Barbara Berntsen, Nicole Scanlon and Cindy Sass-Garcia are the owners of the Village Blend Cafe in Sloatsburg Nov. 8, 2018. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

The timing for a café wasn't right back then, but when the Valley Rock Inn opened, "we were inspired," says Berntsen.

About a year ago, she bumped into Cindy Sass-Garcia, another longtime resident whom Berntsen had known from their days on a committee to revitalize Sloatsburg. The two began talking about what type of business should go into the space.



The Village Blend Cafe in the commuter lot near Sloatsburg Village Hall Nov. 8, 2018. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

"What the area really needed was a café," says Sass-Garcia. "When Barbara told me that's what she's always wanted to do too, we started making plans."

Over the last year, the three women, along with Sass-Garcia's husband, Tim, learned everything they could about owning and operating a café.

"We're extremely detail oriented," says Sass-Garcia, an artist and illustrator by trade who takes inspiration from Parisian patisseries (she even traveled to the French city last winter to take a pastry making course.) "And we want to offer products that reflect how we cook for our own families."

For them that means homemade muffins and cookies (vegan, too), savory quiches and soups, smoothies, and light salads and sandwiches.



Cinnamon buns at the Village Blend Cafe in Sloatsburg Nov. 8, 2018. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

They also carry a well-curated selection of pastries from Balthazar Bakery and artisanal ice cream sourced from a family-owned company in South Jersey (the caramel sauce and hot fudge are made in house).

And then of course, there's the coffee — a Central American blend that's roasted in Stamford, Connecticut — and the inviting leather chairs and eclectic tables that make customers feel as though they're lounging in the personal space of someone with an eye for well-appointed décor.

"We want people to feel relaxed when they come in here, to want to meet friends and stay for a bit," says Berntsen, who also added a cobblestone walkway and outdoor tables to the newly revitalized space.

Community support has been positive in the few weeks The Village Blend has been in business. "I've waited 41 years for this," says Philip Tisi, a former resident who was enjoying a cup of coffee while reading the paper on a recent weekday morning. "Local businesses are the heart of the community. Sloatsburg has tremendous potential and now it's realizing that potential."

And continuing to grow. By month's end, Happy Belly Kitchen, a fast casual dining experience from the owners of Airmont Eats in Airmont is also slated to open on Route 17. Customers will be able to put together their meal "TV dinner style" from a rotating menu of healthy fare such as tofu tikka masala, Mexican tuna salad and Irish curry chicken — and be in and out in 60 seconds or less.

Nearby Tuxedo is also elevating its eatery options: Steve's is on track to open next spring, and will feature brick oven pizza, handmade pasta, sandwiches and salads.

"It's exciting to see Sloatsburg develop into a lifestyle destination," says Michael Bruno, owner of the Valley Rock Inn & Mountain Club. "We have craft beer, a coffeehouse, an organic market and spin and yoga classes all right next door to each other. It's exactly what we need to create a village atmosphere."

As The Village Blend's partners become more comfortable in their new roles as baristas/bakers/business owners, they hope to expand their menu and community offerings. They'd like to add live music sessions or a pop up holiday boutique and are considering hosting painting and tea parties for kids.

Mainly, they hope both commuters and locals alike will take a moment to experience all that Sloatsburg has to offer — while savoring a cappuccino and croissant as they do so. “We want The Village Blend to be something that everyone can enjoy,” says Sass-Garcia. “People are finally waking up and discovering what's really here.”