



Chairish Life is a family affair. Pictured are Megan Roelfs in the middle, her son, Mitchell and her daughter, Maliah.

Maliah, now in charge of much of the cuisine at Chairish Life, gained that invaluable cooking and food service experience at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., near Pebble Beach, where she worked at least 70-hour weeks as a sous chef at one point in time. Now she helps with the ever-changing menu at the coffee shop.

Chairish Life offers several monthly drink specials and has a full espresso bar, cold brews and specialty teas. While some of their purveyors are located in Waterloo or Cedar Falls, the coffee shop tries to keep it close to home. "We're trying to be as local as we can," Maliah stated.

In addition to the drink and food menus, Chairish Life also features various unique vintage items: statues and figurines, glassware, jewelry, rustic and farm memorabilia and Americana. They also have engraved Chairish Life swag: cookbook holders, bags, clothing, games, water bottles and coffee mugs.

The engraved memorabilia, food, and drinks are all done internally; Megan added, "We do all that in-house. We make everything in-house; all the baked goods are made from scratch in-house. So we serve baked goods, different ones daily, fresh daily, and then we also serve sandwiches. And we got a soup every day. Sandwiches, soups salads."

Megan and company try to use locally grown vegetables when crafting food at the coffee shop; one example is the potato soup, with the spuds all coming from the Roelfes' very own gardens. "It just tastes better," Megan mentioned.

She also explained that they had been kicking the tires on collaborating with more nearby farms and growers to ensure that all their dishes are fresh and from local sources, but sometimes it's easier said

than done. "We happen to have our own garden, so that works out great, but sometime in the future, that would be something I would try [working with more local farmers]," Megan stated.

Moving into 2023 and beyond, she had some things that she'd like to focus on: "Things I'd like to improve is just trying to make sure we maintain balance for our staff because food service is a very demanding [industry]. We require a high degree of excellence in service. And to do that takes a lot of energy. We want people that are engaging with our clientele, kind people that are polite and kind... Because everybody deserves that. Because that's how we're trying to show God's love to the community. You come in here. We're not going to spell your name wrong on purpose; we're not going to be ornery with you."

And Maliah added to that, "If your food is good, but your customer service is bad, no one's [going to come back]. What brings people back is the engaging," Maliah stated. "Yep," Megan agreed.

They both want to maintain the excellence they've built since their opening in 2021 because it's a part of what they love about having the coffee shop. "The regulars that we have, they really make this job a blessing to me. That's what makes it worth it pretty much," Maliah expressed.

In some ways, the mother-daughter combo wants the coffee shop to be a beacon of kindness and generosity in the community by creating a culture of radiance through themselves and their staff, where they can be a bright spot in Ackley. "We want to be that light... Be a light in Ackley, with excellence in our food," Megan stated. "Excellence in everything," Maliah declared. "My goal is to treat people how I want to be

treated," Megan added.

"We saw an opportunity for the community," Megan shared. That opportunity came, in its earliest ideation, in December 2020. But it didn't become more of a reality until February 2021, when Megan and her family acquired the downtown building from the Ackley Development Committee. And when officially opening in July '21, it was the direction that they were led in, according to Megan. "God just kind of said, 'This is what you're doing next,'" and led us into the next thing. So this was kind of a surprise... It's more of a vocation than it is an occupation."

The building was in for a surprise, too; the former optometrist's office was rough around the edges in many ways. That is to say, it had too many edges, walls, buffers, and boundaries. There was too much in the way, not conducive to the welcoming, warm environment the Roelfses sought. But, if you've seen Chairish Life already, there are not a lot of those things in the way anymore. The open space in the coffee shop has plenty of room to cherish life, friends, family, and the community — and plenty of seats to chairish it as well. ■

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