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New East Bay space to help nonprofit turn jobless into breadwinners

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EMERYVILLE — The recent expansion of an East Bay baking school, one that targets low-income residents in need of food industry job skills and employment, opens up the



opportunity for a host of silly puns.

"You can go with how it's a great way to make some dough, or make some bread, or how everything is rising — it's almost too much," said Matt Lonner, a partnerships manager with Chevron, which has helped fund The Bread Project.

The baking school celebrated Wednesday the grand opening of a new location at 1555 Park Ave., 8,000 square feet of warehouse and work space that will nearly double the amount of training and production it will be able to do, board President Jason Pena said.



Founded 10 years ago in Kensington, The Bread Project interviews and accepts low-income students, about half from Oakland, and many struggling with the impacts of homelessness, criminal backgrounds, addiction and poverty. Many students come in with no kitchen knowledge — some not even knowing the names of basic appliances — and are helped through the entire process, including training in how to find, attain and keep a job.



For Rick Hornick, 51, of Hayward, the program represents the next step in his 3½ years of recovery from substance abuse. "I've had a lot of jobs but never a real career direction," Hornick said. "This is a big change for me. I'm learning to work with teammates, developing camaraderie. We're taught a lot of life skills at the same time as we're learning how to bake. Things you need for real jobs: punctuality, how to deal with standing on your feet all day. I come early and I stay late all the time, because I don't want to miss anything. "This isn't the easiest thing I've ever done," Hornick added.

"It's hard to work while you're in the school eight hours a day, five days a week. But it's exciting. When I graduate, I'll have a resume all intact and all these enthusiastic people willing to help me out."



For Elvis Rodriguez, 31, of Richmond, the program offers a shot at getting back to work after his struggles in the construction field during the last year.

"My dad is in construction also, and he likes to cook too," Rodriguez said. "He'll get that barbecue in the backyard and throw down. He gets that edge because he can be a chef. I kind of like that I'll be able to have my own edge. I learn more every day, and I can see myself as a baker eventually, when I know more."



David Mauchlan moved to Berkeley from Japan two years ago with a master's degree in English as a Second Language and has struggled to find work ever since, he said, because all his references are in Japan and unavailable to Bay Area employers.

"My dad's in his 80s, and we're living behind his home," said Mauchlan, who is married. "It's getting to where each day is a risk. How long before we're on the street? Even when I do get my foot in the door, for what people are hiring I'm told I'm too educated. I went to Whole Foods and offered, 'I'll even stock the shelves.' No luck. Now, at least I'm learning a skill. This is the first program I've found to offer a solution."

The new space recently was vacated by Semifreddi's Bakery, which moved to Alameda. The bakery's owners still have two years left on their lease in the Park Avenue space and offered to pay half of The Bread Project's rent through the end of that lease.

"That helps everybody," said John Tredgold, head baker at Semifreddi's, who persuaded the bakery's owners to begin donating ingredients and sponsoring demonstrations at The Bread Project in Berkeley about five years ago.

"Their old space was too small, too crowded," he said. "They knew they had to move. This is their big jump. I just saw they needed help and thought we should. There are very few places you can learn how to make artisan bread — most stuff is focused on being a chef. So I thought it was our duty to do that."

The school now offers programs in Berkeley and Emeryville. For more information, call 510-644-4575 or 510-594-1702, e-mail info@breadproject.org or visit www.breadproject.org.