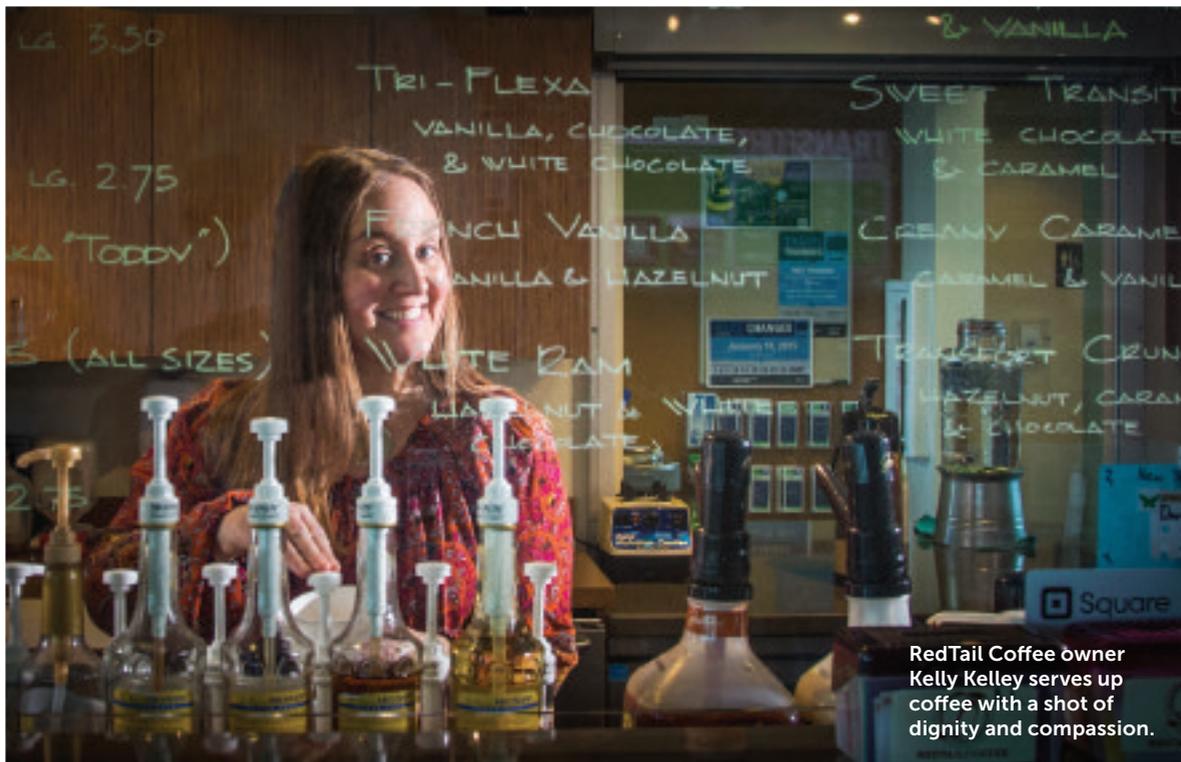


{FOODIE PROFILE}

# A Cup of COMMUNITY

RedTail Coffee takes on homelessness while warming the hearts of neighborhood locals.

BY SANDRA HUME



RedTail Coffee owner Kelly Kelley serves up coffee with a shot of dignity and compassion.



**W**HEN REDTAIL COFFEE WAS ROBBED, nine days before last Christmas, it might have been a low point for the fledgling coffee shop. But then Kelly Kelley, who runs the shop with her husband, Seth, decided to post a video-capture image of the perpetrator on the shop's Facebook page, thinking someone might recognize him.

Instead, by Christmas Eve loyal customers banded together for a daylong “Grinchless Christmas” event to recoup the shop’s losses. It was the most profitable day the business had seen to date, and additional donations totaled more than \$500, far more than the thief stole. Kelly can’t keep tears out of her eyes as she recalls, “It really was mind-blowing to see how much people cared.”

It’s true—RedTail evokes strong emotions. It’s a coffee shop with a social mission: to help the homeless by employing them. “A customer respects their barista, and that type of respect is something we want to give to our employees,” says Seth. “People end up challenging their own stereotypes without realizing it.”

When the Kelleys moved to Fort Collins from Alaska, finding a way to give back was priority one. To Seth, it was simply part of making a new home: “Instead of expecting the community to give to you, you give to the community.” A veteran social activist, he started making calls. Then two things happened: Seth and Kelly attended a heated meeting of neighbors of Red Tail Ponds, recently constructed homeless housing; and they discovered that the coffee-shop space at the South Transit Center of the MAX, just north



of the controversial housing, was available. And there it was: open the shop, hire the homeless, and be part of the solution.

Coffee hadn’t been on their radar at all; Kelly doesn’t even drink it. But they knew they could draw on their past activist (Seth) and education (Kelly) experience in Alaska to get the shop going. Kelly is behind the counter three to four days a week (Seth works full time as the director of B.A.S.E. Camp) serving customers, training and supervising employees, and managing inventory. But while business is growing slowly, tax payments mean the Kelleys have to take it week by week. To make payroll, Kelly draws no salary. Because the space is



PHOTOGRAPHS: MATTHEW GRAVES

{ ROUNDUP }

# Best Bet BRUNCHES

These late-morning nosh ninjas have perfected the breakfast-lunch marriage. BY LISA POGUE

city-owned, opportunities for signage are sparse and slow in the approval process. “Most of our customers find us for the first time by accident,” Kelly says. “They come in and say ‘I had no idea this was here!’”

The hiring process can be challenging. Though applicants are interviewed by referral, there have been no-shows. Kelly is the first to say she’s had to adjust expectations. “My eyes have been opened to a lot of things. Homelessness is an all-day job. To sleep somewhere at night, you have to put your name in four hours before beds open. I’ve had people say to me, ‘I just don’t have the energy to look for a full-time job.’ And I get it.” So far, RedTail has hired two homeless employees, both of whom have moved into permanent housing, which is exactly the goal. They’re currently interviewing for another.

RedTail differentiates itself in the saturated coffee space in subtle ways. Frequent customers can leave their loyalty cards in a box on the counter, so they don’t have to carry them around. La Creperie’s croissants and burritos from Longmont’s Burrito Kitchen are among the NoCo-based offerings. There’s a “leave-one, take-one” box started by local Girl Scouts for those who might not have the essentials. Housed in the southernmost MAX station, the shop is a clearinghouse for Fort Collins public transportation information—and a favorite of MAX drivers. Kelly, a CSU grad and Colorado native, tries to involve the business in the community as much as possible, such as when she hosted a talk to a CSU undergrad group of entrepreneurs.

Then there’s the shop’s feel. The Kelleys want RedTail to be as welcoming as possible to everyone, whatever their story. Customers may leave with a housing application along with their cup of coffee. Three-chair tables encourage strangers to sit together when it’s crowded. People who can’t afford their coffee might receive an anonymously donated gift card.

Sometimes Kelly fears she’s taking on too much, worrying about regulars who stop showing up, or wondering if someone has gotten help for a medical condition. But she knows she couldn’t do it any differently. “I did not expect how much I would love coming into work every day, getting to talk and hear everyone’s stories, hear where they’re at, and make connections.”  
4915 Fossil Blvd., 970-223-3638, redtailcompanies.com

## RISE

Epicurean with extra special touches are earning this new-in-2014 Fort Collins restaurant an a.m. fan club. Personal French presses, fresh-squeezed juices, local cage-free eggs and natural meats, and butters and sauces made in-house whenever possible are just the beginning.

The atmosphere is welcoming with local art, a repurposed beetlekill bar, and a good-looking patio.

Adult flavors resembling robust dinner fare fill out the from-scratch menu: breakfast beef carnitas, cinnamon roll French toast with a decadent cream cheese icing butter and maple agave syrup, and an impressive artisan breakfast cocktail list. Don’t miss their gluten-free menu (think corn-cakes with house chorizo).

2601 S. Lemay Ave. #31, 970-672-8647, risebreakfastplace.com

## CAFÉ VINO

Café Vino turns heads with a European-spun menu covering breakfast, brunch (weekends only), lunch, and beyond. Morning outings become multi-course linger-fests that kick off with peach nectar mimosas and wrap up over apple crisp cheesecake. Indulgent and worth it is the name of the brunch game here.

Morning cocktail lovers will appreciate bottomless mimosas and the Cajun Bloody Mary with Bulleit bourbon, housemade mix, Old Bay, Worcestershire, and horseradish.

Entrees include a farm-fresh frittata of eggs,

roasted tomatoes, butternut squash, and gruyere cheese. The pork belly and grits sings with brown-sugar-roasted Berkshire pork belly and Haystack green chile goat cheese white corn grits.

1200 S. College Ave., 970-212-3399, cafevino.com



## THE BACKPORCH CAFÉ ▲

Cozy up at a table on the shaded patio at the Backporch and you’ll feel like you’re having brunch at your favorite aunt’s farmhouse.

All baking and meat-smoking is done in house, the coffee is locally roasted, and the staff is super friendly. Try the Farmer’s Breakfast Burrito with ham, bacon, zucchini, mushrooms, potatoes, onions, and bell peppers; the Belgium waffle with strawberries; or the spinach quiche.

Wash it down with a Manmosa, concocted with Easy Street Wheat beer from neighboring Odell Brewing Co. and orange juice. Take home a fresh baked cherry or apple pie for dessert later.  
1101 E. Lincoln Ave., 970-224-2338, TheBackPorchCafe.com

COURTESY PHOTOGRAPHS

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- Sugar-free options
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- Great selection of fresh fruit toppings

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