

# Explore the River Bend: Duke Bakery builds legacy in Alton after 64 years

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Duke Bakery continues to build on a 64-year-old family tradition in the baking business.

Mike Doucleff, the son of Duke founders Helen and Chris Doucleff, is still involved in the business as an owner with his daughter, Amy Hollis, and son-in-law, Ben Hollis.

The Duke Bakery shop on Henry Street in Alton remains the hub for the business, with a location for distribution in Granite City at 3202 Nameoki Road.

Mike Doucleff and Amy Hollis started their career with the family business folding boxes.

“I started folding pie boxes in 1952 on our living room floor,” Mike Doucleff said. “My dad never got wet walking to work; we lived next door.”

Amy said she has been in the family business for about 20 years and full time for 15 years. She and Ben Hollis manage the business today.

Mike Doucleff said his daughter and son-in-law have tremendous energy that helps make the business what it is today.

Mike’s father always wanted a bakery and in 1951, they started it and it has been in the family ever since.

From 1951-1955, the family owned a soda business, too, but that part of the business eventually went away.

Today, about six bakers go hard at it every day at the Duke operation. Amy said Duke Bakery has a hometown and neighborhood tradition and known everywhere throughout Alton and beyond.

Ben supervises the bakers, often helps mix, and also does sales. The operation now reaches many restaurants, bars and convenience stores with buns and other bakery items. Ben calls on many of the customers and services their needs.

Each week, the business averages production of 12,000 to 15,000 buns and 1,500 dozen donuts, with distribution throughout the region. Many are not aware of how big the Duke operation is and its reach, Ben said. During the summer months, the business can prepare as many as 20,000 buns for a weekend.

Hard work and a great, friendly staff have been a key to the business success, Amy and Ben said. Mike Doucleff, Amy and Ben said the other key is offering the best customer service possible.

Duke Bakery has always done a wholesale business but in the last four to five years there has been tremendous growth in bars and restaurants carrying the products. Buns are most popular in the business, but donuts follow next then cookies as largest production items.

Mike loves mingling with the customers and is known to almost everyone around the Alton area because of the bakery. Many of the customers have been coming to the

bakery for years and years and Mike and his daughter and son-in-law know almost everything about their families.

What Amy enjoys the most is being involved in people's lives from the start of their lives to end.

“We are part of people's lives not just in good times, but all the time,” she said. “People visit us for births, baby showers, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and even funerals. I don't know of any other business that touches everybody's lives the way we do as a bakery.”

