Community Profiles

"Fill your life with adventures, not things."

Finnish Proverb

Crisp, bold, bright

These sparkling beverages are teeming with life

As an alternative to spirits, wine or soda pop, locally brewed kombucha has it all: bright colors, inventive flavors and fizzy effervescence. The long fermentation infuses lively probiotics that aid gut health, immune function and pH balance. Here, Janie Otero, owner of Springs Culture Kombucha, shares more about the business of "booch," fire-in-cider, elixir shots and even (get this) kombucha ice cream, an exclusive offered only at Ranch Foods Direct!

DESCRIBE YOUR BUSINESS.

I make 300 gallons a month on a 28-month fermentation schedule. Then I put it all into 12-ounce bottles and kegs. My biggest customer is a local juice bar. Ranch Foods Direct is my second largest customer. I focus on specialty stores, bars and restaurants. I'm also open one day a week for customers who want to come to my brewing space to get refills.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

I signed the lease on my space on March 18, 2020, if you can believe that. Everything was shutting down due to Covid, but I said, "Okay, let's do it." I like to think if I jump in whole-heartedly, the world will catch me. Only by taking great risks can you redeem great rewards. If I can create a vehicle that does for others what it did for me, that's my artistic work. Brewing is all science, and I love science. Having a wholesale business is also great for me, because I like being the wizard behind the curtain.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO TAKE THE LEAP?

It would kill me not to do my dream. You have to get to that point in life where you ask yourself, "What are you afraid of?" After all, I almost died. Years ago, when I found out I had peritoneal mesothelioma, I thought, "I'm only 40, there's no way my story is going to end this way." I did my homework and decided I wanted to live more than anything. I suffered from acidosis for a long time, which is why I started making kombucha in the 1990s — it helps correct the pH in the body. I'm proud of everything that got me to where I am now.

ARE YOU A NATIVE?

I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, and I've traveled some, but this is my home. The first time I saw the mountains was when I came here in 1975. I grew up in this town, and I love it.

HOW'S THE FIT SELLING THROUGH RANCH FOODS DIRECT?

I'm so grateful they want to work with me, because I want to work with them! They understand what it means to be grassroots. I love that everything is locally sourced. I think that's critical. If a local butcher is inviting other vendors in, isn't that how a city like Colorado Springs should work?

DESCRIBE YOUR WINTER SEASONAL FLAVORS.

I'm in chai-land right now, with all that warm essense of cardamon and spice. I'll do chai until May, when I'll switch over to hibiscus tea, with its pretty pink color and refreshing floral notes.

ANY HOBBIES?

I love to roller blade, and I love riding bicycles. I started riding because I needed it. Sometimes there's nothing better than just not thinking about anything. To just be in the now. Balance to me is everything. That's why I like making kombucha. It helps with being in the now. Everything seems to happen so quick and fast these days. But this is an organic process you can't speed up.

Janie's brewing space is only a few blocks away from Ranch Foods Direct in a warehouse near the corner of Fillmore and Cascade.

Master Crafter

Five years ago craft butcher Ben Buchanan launched United Fields, a business that provides mobile processing, teaching and consulting. Early on, while he was still fine-tuning his craft, he toured Callicrate Cattle Company and Ranch Foods Direct to study the components of the pasture-to-plate model. More recently, he returned in a professional capacity to provide consulting and training services to the company. Here's more about how his craft turned into a calling.

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH MIKE CALLICRATE AND RANCH FOODS DIRECT?

We are both on the board of a group called Farm Action. But I knew about him before that because of his work with mobile slaughter. I was building my own mobile unit back home in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, so I contacted him about coming to check out his unit and pick his brain. That was in 2020. After that, it was off to the races for me. I went back home to build out my own unit and now I'm in the process of getting a larger unit up and running.

ANY EARLY EXPERIENCES THAT HELPED SHAPE YOU?

I've been into long-distance biking since I was old enough to ride. In the spring of 2007, I gave away most of my stuff, ran out the lease on my place, hopped on my bike and started riding across the Appalachian Mountains. I stopped at my buddy's in West Virginia and we made jerky I could use as currency for my 9-month trip.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO CRAFT BUTCHERING?

In 2003, when I was around 18 or 19, I was working at a convenience store and not making much money. My girlfriend at the time told me the slaughterhouse down the road was hiring. It was just a job at first, but I've always had a chip on my shoulder for doing hard stuff. So, I just stuck with it and learned from anybody I could, including working with the old-timers who had been doing it their whole life and picking up best practices from them. I treated it like a professional sport, just trying to be the fastest and cleanest, and eventually I got really good at it.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE MOBILE PROCESSING?

I'd been working at a meat plant for six years or so when Covid hit, and that turned the meat industry on its head. I'd already been building a mobile rig leading up to that point, with whatever time I had on the weekends. But that convinced me to double down and actually get it up and running. That's when I started my company using seed investment from outside sources. Originally, I thought I would mainly be a mobile butcher. But as I got out more and talked to more farmers, I realized how much of a skills gap there is in the industry. That's when I decided to lean into training and workforce development. I developed the first meat-cutting apprenticeship in Pennsylvania, partnering with a nonprofit that upskills people for work in the restaurant and food industry. They loved my intro-to-butchering class so much that they wanted to build on it. Eventually we got a retail shop up and running, and I'm hoping to use that as a springboard to raise the funds to develop a full-scale apprenticeship center. I have the business plan and facility design ready, I just need to put the rest of the pieces together.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO DO THIS WORK?

The challenge is what got me to stick with it over the years, but it's also just really rewarding to feed wholesome food to people and, of course, you're always the life of the party wherever you go, because you're always bringing the fresh bacon and cool stuff like that. Also, since I came up learning from some of the old-timers, I know there's not many people following in their shoes, and I don't want to see the trade die out.

TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK WITH SMALL PLANTS.

I've got clients all over the country who hire me to do efficiency audits, safety training, workforce development, and sometimes even pinch-hit for them as plant manager. The number one challenge for small plants by far is not having enough skilled labor. That's why I want to start a dedicated apprenticeship center and send trained butchers out all across the country.

WHAT'S YOUR OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE?

I feel like the tide is turning, in terms of the general mindset when it comes to the education system and career aspirations. The idea of going to college and getting a degree is waning, and the skilled trades are ascending, which is helpful to our industry. I have a lot of hope for today's youth. Everyone wants to talk about how they don't want to work and are stuck on their phones all the time. But I've seen kids in their late teens gung-ho to learn a trade and getting very good at it. So that's promising.

Happy to source local

Burgers, fries and coffee locally sourced and served in a casual atmosphere rich with historical significance — the newly opened Happy Cow focuses on details that really matter

THE BUILDING: Once a Greek Orthodox bookstore and more recently a commissary kitchen, the iconic two-story building at the corner of West Colorado Avenue and 29th Street is returning to its roots as a community gathering place with the arrival of The Happy Cow, a casual coffee and lunch spot. Long before its run as a bookstore, it served as the town's first city hall building. Surrounded by the artful, historic vibe of Old Colorado City, but located just west of where those annoying parking meters end, owner Jordan Ranieri said he and his wife Delphy are delighted by the space, with its distinctive Southwestern-style awning in front and an interior featuring ornate chandeliers, rustic fireplaces and exposed brick that dates back to the 1880s.

THE MENU: Streamlined and straightforward, but what immediately stands out is the care the couple have taken in choosing their suppliers. Coffee drinks feature beans roasted nearby. The star of the show is a tender Ranch Foods Direct Wagyu burger served on a pillowy organic sourdough bun made by Nature's Start, a local bakery. The smashburgers are piled high with just the right amount of crisp lettuce and tomato, and dripping with a special house-made sauce that combines the creaminess of ranch with the zestiness of Thousand Island. The hand-cut fries are cooked in Callicrate beef tallow.

QUALITY SOURCING: Jordan (above with Ranch Foods Direct owner Mike Callicrate) sources ground meat, bacon and beef tallow exclusively from Ranch Foods Direct. Making the fries is "quite a process," demonstrating their commitment to following all the steps to do things right. Their three guiding principles, promoted on signage and menus, are 1) real dairy (meaning milk from cows with the A2 gene associated with easier digestibility) 2) no seed oils and 3) no refined sugar. For sweetening, they use maple syrup, honey or coconut. Next to the front counter is a display of Delphy's popular Heavenly Render skincare products, made with Callicrate beef tallow. "It's been going really good so far," Jordan said a few days after their late December opening. "I think it shows people want better food, and the name recognition of Ranch Foods Direct is a big draw."

For a full menu, go to HappyCowColorado.com. Take-out option available. Open daily except for Sundays and Mondays at 2902 W. Colorado Ave.

Featured Recipe

Red Wine-Braised Beef Chuck Pot Roast

Recipe by local chef Christine Adrian Miller, co-creator of the Season Two Taste recipe blog

HOW TO PREP THE ROAST

3- to 4-lb. Callicrate chuck roast (rolled and tied as pictured)
12 oz. red wine
4 oz. fresh whole garlic cloves
2 oz. fresh rosemary, on the stems
1 lb. peeled whole carrots
1 lb. whole, small-to-medium potatoes
2 tsp. salt
2 tsp. ground black pepper
2 tsp. granulated garlic
1 to 2 cups beef broth (or substitute water)
2 oz. butter
4 Tbsp. cornstarch
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
½ cup cold water

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Coat the roast with salt, black pepper, and granulated garlic. Peel the fresh garlic cloves. Heat 2 tbsp of vegetable oil in a large dutch oven. Place the seasoned roast in the dutch oven over medium high heat. Brown the roast on all sides. Then lower the heat and add the garlic cloves and rosemary sprigs to the pot. Carefully add the red wine to the pot, deglazing the bottom of the pan. Then add one cup beef broth. Cover the pot and place it into the preheated oven for 1 hour. While the beef is in the oven, peel the carrots and rinse the potatoes. After the first hour, remove the pot from the oven and add the carrots and potatoes. If the liquid has evaporated a little too much, add more broth (or water) up to approximately 1 cup. (There should be at least 2 cups of liquid in the pot.) Cover the pot again and return it to the oven for an additional hour. After the hour is up, remove the lid and place the pot back into the oven for about 30 minutes more, making certain to keep an eye on the liquid in the pot in case more broth or water is needed. After cooking, remove the beef and vegetables from the pot and set them aside to rest. Remove the rosemary stems and place the pot over low to medium heat. Mix the cold water and cornstarch together until smooth. Stir the cornstarch mixture into the pot liquid, add more broth, water, or even a bit more wine until the sauce is thickened but pourable. Stir in the butter to finish and enrich the sauce, and season to taste with salt and black pepper before serving.

PIKES PEAK PERMACULTURE

Coming soon: Pikes Peak Permaculture will offer a seven-month weekend design course starting February 27. Early registration ends January 5. Training includes a deep dive into ecosystems, water systems, micro-climates and design methodology. More at PikesPeakPermaculture.org.

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Building a community around local food

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PEAK TO PLAINS FOOD HUB

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