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# Life of professional baker requires early starts, and a little self control

The life of a professional baker is not for anyone prone to tapping the snooze button on their alarm clock.

“I come in between 3 a.m. and 3:30 a.m., seven days a week,” said Chad VanDeVoord, owner of Sweet Buns Bakery, which opened in Port Washington this summer.

Working at such an early hour, VanDeVoord said, it is essential to follow an exacting schedule.

“The first thing that goes into the oven is the sweet rolls. They have to be ready when people start showing up on their way to work,” he said.

“The last things that gets done are the various breads. It is a lot of work, but I still enjoy it.”

VanDeVoord said he has quickly learned the preferences of his customers. The most popular item in the store — M&M cookies.

He said he has readily settled into the cycle of each week.

“During the work week, our best customers have been the Aurora Medical Clinic and Allen-Edmunds. On the weekends, the biggest seller is our Sunday hot ham and rolls, with rolls I make at the shop,” he said.

VanDeVoord, who grew up in Illinois, said the ham-and-rolls phenomenon is peculiar to Wisconsin.

Specialty breads are also a big hit, with the shop sometimes selling as many as 50 loaves a day.

Although he works in what could be described as a treat lover's paradise, VanDeVoord's thin frame confirms that he doesn't binge often on doughnuts and cakes.

"I'll grab something to eat occasionally, but when you work around bakery every day, it doesn't really tempt you that much," VanDeVoord said.

The shop at 477 Grand Ave. has been the site of various businesses in recent years, including the former Oma's Breads.

"I still get people coming in, saying how much they miss Oma's," VanDeVoord said.

VanDeVoord said he knew he wanted to be a baker since he was a child.

"It all started when my grandmother used to be the baker for a truck stop in Illinois. I would watch her do all the baking and learned," he said.

VanDeVoord later earned a degree in pastry arts at Elgin Community College.

"It was a four-year program that took you through every step along the way, from the simple process of mixing flour and sugar all the way to making petit fours," he said.

VanDeVoord worked as a grocery store baker for several years, but was called to put his talents in the kitchen to a more demanding test.

"I wasn't really looking for a place to open my own bakery, but I passed this building and saw that it was available for lease. It had such great curb appeal," he said.

"I've gotten a lot of compliments about the bakery. A lot of people say it is so cute, it should be in Door County."