

# Downtown Grocery cooks up success

By Amanda Seitz

Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

WAUSAU — Kevin Korpela likes to think it takes the same amount of time for someone to order a Big Mac, fries and soda at McDonald's as it does to pick up a salad, soup and a tofu-walnut burger at Downtown Grocery.

"It's vegetarian fast-food with a strong, healthy food side," Korpela said of the grocery store, bakery and cafe he co-owns in downtown Wausau.

Korpela said that after opening six years ago as an organic grocery store, he has focused efforts on building the cafe section of his business which offers an array of gluten-free, organic and healthy food for people on the go. His kitchen has become home to three health-food vendors in the past two years. One of those vendors is the Be-Well Bakeshop, which prepares muffins and breads at the store for customers to grab on a busy morning.



Wausau's Downtown Grocery.

Egg-free, nut-free or gluten-free, you name it, and health-conscious customers can find it.

"They're thoughtful recipes that are gluten-free," Korpela said. "It's a world-inspired menu."

Downtown Grocery wants to become a one-stop shop for those who want to live a healthy lifestyle, Megan Curtes, one of the managers at Downtown Grocery, said. The store now offers grass-fed meats, educational books about food as well as beauty supplies and health supplements.

"That area has been definitely growing," Curtes said.

Curtes said with more people becoming interested in health recently, man-

agers have made a bigger effort to train employees to be ready for customers' questions about food health.

"Our customers are becoming more and more interested about where their food is coming from," Curtes said. "(We're) spending time with staff, more time for training. What we do really well here is we listen, educate and support."

Curtes said the store, which is overflowing with baskets full of tomatoes, cucumbers and other fresh fruits, might soon have to expand.

"Here, we're sort of busting out of our seams (and) we'll need to continue to add products," Curtes said.



Wausau's Downtown Grocery has expanded from offering just organic food into healthy fast food and fresh-baked products for people on the go.



Megan Curtes poses at Wausau's Downtown Grocery. PHOTOS BY DAN YOUNG/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA

## EMPLOYEE PROFILE: MEGAN CURTES

Age: 35

Residence: Wausau

Position: Store manager, owner of Be-Well Bakeshop

**What you should know:** Megan Curtes is one of the people who has helped the Downtown Grocery grow from just a grocery store to a place where people can quickly grab a premade breakfast, lunch or dinner. Curtes makes gluten-free and vegan baked goods from the store's kitchen and sells them at the Downtown Grocery for

hungry passersby to pick up a muffin or a cookie. She opened the Be-Well Bakeshop in January 2010, shortly after becoming an employee at Downtown Grocery. Curtes, who says she's sensitive to gluten and stays away from wheat products, tries to show people that desserts can still taste sweet, even gluten-free.

"We believe making something without can be just as good," Curtes said. She likes to find ways to make her menu items flavorful but leave out anything unnecessary or that might provoke food allergies.

## DOWNTOWN GROCERY.COM LLC

Established: 2006

Address: 607 3rd St., Wausau

Owners: Kevin Korpela and Blaine Tornow

Employees: 10