'EVERY BAGEL HAS A STOR'

Memaw's Bagels set to open storefront in Questa

By Olivia Lewis
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CLEMENTINE MILLER/Taos News
Brenda Wills poses for a portrait holding a fresh bagel in Questa Saturday (Sept. 19).
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Glossy golden bagels emerge from Brenda Wills' oven. Wills, founder of Memaw's Bagels in Questa, says the thin crust on the outside and dense, chewy center is the result of months of experimentation she's spent in pursuit of the "true bagel."

Bagel fanatics wary of donut-shaped bread masquerading as a bagel, rejoice: These bagels are boiled.

"The longer you boil them, the chewier they get," said Wills, who sells dozens of bagels at the seasonal Questa Farmers Market each week. "I boil them in baking soda and honey water, then I brush them with the eggs. The honey is what gives them that nice golden color, then the egg wash on top is what gives them that shiny look."

Now, more than a year since Wills began selling at the market, Memaw's Bagels is getting its first storefront location. Wills will open a small bakery near the Family Dollar and Questa Lumber & Hardware stores in Questa, where she'll serve up homemade bagels, sandwiches, soups and coffee.

Wills hopes to open in early to mid-October. Hours aren't set, but she plans to initially operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The bakery's opening follows grant funding that Wills won in the Questa Economic Development Fund's 2026 Questa Pitch Contest, which awarded $30,000 in grant funding to nine local entrepreneurs.

The contest is organized annually by the Questa Economic Development Fund through the Questa Business Bridge. It allows each contestant five minutes to pitch for funding to start their business, followed by a question-and-answer period with a panel of five judges. A total of nine contestants received funding, while the top four, including Wills, received the full amount requested or more.

“With that money I won, I’m using that to get me into the building and then buying the equipment I need because I’ve already proven that the demand is there,” Wills said. "Now, I just need to get a place to be able to support that demand.”

Wills, who founded Memaw’s Bakery in September 2025, first began making bagels for friends and family. After being laid off from her job, she decided it was time to take control of her livelihood and turn her love for feeding people into a full-time business. She started out by selling her bagels at the Questa Farmers Market, where visitors now line up to her stand 15 minutes before the market opens.

She also saw few options for fresh, locally made bagels in Taos County.

“I wanted to do something that I enjoy doing, something that can benefit the community, because there’s not really any good fresh local bagels around here. You have to either drive out to Taos or Santa Fe.”

Some of her bagels come speckled with roasted New Mexico green chile and cheddar, while others come loaded with spinach, bacon and artichoke. Whenever possible, she sources ingredients locally and makes all of her flavored cream cheeses from scratch.

Wills prefers to experiment with flavors that are unlikely to be found at grocery stores, like spinach artichoke and pistachio honey. She intentionally makes her bagels at about five ounces each.

“I wanted to make them a good size because most of the time, you see all of these mass-produced bagels that are little three-and-a-half-ounce bagels,” Wills said.

“Every bagel has a story and every story deserves a place at our table,” she said, describing one of her mottos.

Wills comes from “a line of cooks” and some of her strongest memories growing up in upstate New York center around crowded kitchens and big family meals. Her father was an avid cook, she said, and he always cooked enough to share.

“When he’d cook, all of the kids from the neighborhood would come,” Wills said. “All of the kids would camp out in the living room — boys, girls, whatever. We’d all just camp out and Dad would cook up something. They always knew when he was cooking. Their parents didn’t really like it too much because they ate over at our house, but he was a fabulous cook up until he passed away.”

“He always made sure that there was enough for everybody,” she added. “That’s how we were brought up.”

She tries to model her father’s generosity in her everyday life. A year or so ago, Wills, her daughter and granddaughter roasted nine Thanksgiving turkeys, then distributed them to people in need at the Questa Market. When they still had food remaining, they started passing out food in Taos.

“I cooked up nine turkeys and made a bunch of cans of stuffing, then we went to Questa Market and my daughter, granddaughter and I were giving out food for people who couldn’t afford to have a Thanksgiving. Then, we went to Taos and we didn’t get a lot of people in Taos, so we filled up the containers, drove around and started handing these people food.”

Wills initially imagined buying a food truck for Memaw’s Bagels so she could travel to customers; but said the Questa location will help her create a homey, welcoming atmosphere reminiscent of sharing food around a table with her grandma.

“You think about going to grandma’s house, sitting around the table, and everybody loved going to grandma’s because you always had these big dinners and had all of these conversations,” Wills said. “Back then, we didn’t have all of the technology we have now, so we had to talk.”

“That’s where a lot of the best conversations are — in the kitchen around the table,” she added. “I wanted it to be Memaw’s table.”

Memaw’s Bagels' customer base has grown beyond Questa. Besides selling bagels at the Questa Farmers Market, Wills also does catering and delivery orders. She’s delivered bagels to Taos and Red River. Her sister, who helps here and there, has made deliveries as far as Antonito, Colorado.

At the Questa Farmers Market recently, Wills met people visiting from Kansas who told her they were following Memaw’s Bagels online and sought out her table.

“I had some people come to my table today,” Wills said on Sunday (Sept. 20). “They’re from Wichita, Kansas. They said, ‘We’ve been seeing your stuff on Facebook and we had to come over and get some bagels.’ To hear people from other states saying, ‘We've been wanting to come and try some of your bagels’ or ‘We’ve been seeing your posts all over Facebook’ is amazing.”

Wills plans to continue offering catering and deliveries once Memaw’s Bagels’ storefront location is open. She hopes that the business will become something her children and grandchildren can not only be proud of, but also possibly carry on.

“Memaw’s Bagels, it will be my legacy,” Wills said. “Like I said, I want something that my grandkids can be proud of and would want to carry it on to make a name.”

Wills’ 12-year-old granddaughter, Lilah Knuck, who Wills has raised since she was three, may already be following in her family’s footsteps. Knuck has started a small venture called Pink Apron Bakery, through which she bakes and sells cookies, bread and lemonade.

Wills said she sees Memaw’s Bagels growing beyond a single bakery. If that becomes the case, she intends to retain her business’ “small town atmosphere.”

“We’ll just have to have a bigger table,” Wills said. “That’s all.’”

Memaw’s Bagels are available at the seasonal Questa Farmers Market, which is open 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Sundays through Oct. 4.

The storefront location of Memaw's will be located at 2349 NM 522 Suite 4 in Questa. To order a delivery or for general inquiries, call 407-617-8761 or send a message through Memaw’s Bagels’ Facebook page.