

# AS SEEN IN...

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Grace McGartland, left, chairperson of The Arts and Cookery Bank in West Lorne, assists chef Kim Saunders in the preparation of Lake Erie perch.

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# Banking on arts and food

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WEST LORNE — At this very spot, in the stairwell leading to the upstairs apartment from the bank-turned-laundromat, Dave Page proposed to Pam McGill:  
"On the landing, he said, 'Close your eyes and hold out your hand,'" she recalls.

Dave placed something fuzzy into her outstretched palm.

"He was a real jokester," Pam says with a broad smile. "It could have been a mouse, it could have been anything. So I heaved it down the stairs."

It was a velvet box containing an engagement ring. She said yes.

Dave and Pam, owners of the Lions Gate Bed & Breakfast in nearby Rodney, have been married now for 45 years.

The building that played such a role in their personal history is about to take centre stage in the community's story — and help grow the future of local businesses such as the Pages'.

In its rebirth, this is The Arts and Cookery Bank, a not-for-profit centre intended to be a magnet for food tourism and accessible rural culture.

Its physical space houses a showpiece kitchen, an events hall, walls of virtual photo galleries and a digital photography lab. Its vision is about much more: This is a starting point where people can get a taste of the rich rural experience they can further explore nearby.

"The whole building is about celebration," says Grace McGartland, board chairperson and co-founder. "It's not a museum. It's about celebration, a way to build community."

It's housed in the former



MORE: See what's cooking at the Arts and Cookery Bank at [lfpres.com/video](http://lfpres.com/video)



In 1965, Dave and Pam Page became engaged at the former West Lorne bank which, has been transformed into The Arts and Cookery Bank. It's a not-for-profit centre intended to be a magnet for food tourism and accessible rural culture.

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Bank of Montreal branch, built in 1914 and transformed into a high-ceilinged great hall with several touch-screen photo galleries chronicling life in four townships.

If the former bank is the core, its attached 1883 timber-frame barn, moved from a farm and re-assembled by local timberframe guildsman Wade Davey, is the heart. Beneath its hand-hewn 15-inch square beams is an enormous, gleaming studio-ready kitchen that would make any foodie salivate.

It's designed to showcase the best of local foods, by local chefs and cooks, in a way that's accessible to just about everyone — through cooking shows (the kitchen is wired to accept multiple cameras and screens), demonstrations, corporate retreats, team-building exercises, fundraisers, reunions and galas.

This day, Kim Saunders, chef at the Windjammer Inn in Port Stanley, coaches a group of visitors in a hands-on lunch demonstration including all local in-season ingredients:

- A summer salad with grilled asparagus, new potatoes, cherry tomatoes, radish and arugula all from area farms and greenhouses. (The farms' business cards are nearby; their locations also plotted on an interactive, touchscreen map of local attractions, which is also online at [theartsandcookerybank.com/CARMap](http://theartsandcookerybank.com/CARMap))

- Cornmeal-crusted yellow perch freshly caught in Lake Erie (pan-cook on high heat, skin-side up, Saunders teaches.)

- For dessert, a strawberry-

rhubarb crumble tart with sweet cream and a "kiss" of lavender.

- To drink, Quai du Vin from a local vineyard, or a rhubarb-ade sweetened with maple syrup produced from trees down the road and brightened with a hint of mint from her own garden.

Everything here has a story, McGartland notes, right down to the elegant white coffee cups that originally came from a local teacher who received them as a gift in the 1890s.

"We've got a great story to tell in this area, and most rural areas

do — and we just want to step up to it," adds Duncan Morrison. "We're committed to preserving our rural lifestyle by preserving our rural culture."

An intriguing part of the project is the virtual photo gallery in the "bank" part of the building.

So far, 2,000 photos have been loaded into the database, with thousands more in progress. They're coded by theme, date and people — so a visitor can see photos of shopkeepers from the 1920s or search both old and new pics of the elementary school's graduating class, for example.

They can also learn how to add to their stories to the digital record of events and places; beginning and advanced photography courses will be offered in the well-equipped photo lab.

The Arts and Cookery Bank is expected to be open fully late this summer. More than 100 volunteers have worked on it since it was first conceived in 2007. Its total cost will be \$843,000, much of it coming from three government levels and private donations.

McGartland figures the payoff will be in a renewed pride of place for area residents, and a sense of discovery for visitors.

"The foundation of this area was agriculture and it is still. The most important element of our economy is farming. It's an important part of the fabric of our area and of Canada."

"These are stories that we want to bring back to life, then it encourages people to take up residence here."

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### Arts and Cookery Bank

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