

# Preaching and Percolating

## Gillespie Family Operates Unique Coffee Business

By Sue Mroz

Folks conversing with Rev. Christopher Gillespie often ask, "What's brewing?"

That's because Gillespie, 41, installed last November as pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Sherman Center, owns and operates what he describes as a hobby business — Coffee by Gillespie. "My coffee is fearlessly roasted for customers and features single origin and specialty blended coffees from around the world," said the self taught coffee connoisseur, a native of West Lafayette, Ind.

"When I drink coffee, I want to drink the best. All of my coffee is roasted to order, and my customers are guaranteed to have the freshest, flavorful coffee around," he said. "I roast on-demand and ship the coffee within two business days of an order or pick up at our home. Your coffee arrives on your doorstep at the beginning of its peak flavor and can be ordered as whole bean or already ground. I also offer a decaf variety."

### Beans from Distant Lands

Coffee by Gillespie, initiated in 2015, is now located in a workshop of the Random Lake home he and his wife Anne purchased last fall.

While he is preparing sermons, teaching religion at St. John's Lutheran School or roasting coffee, Anne home-schools seven of their nine children — Ethan, 18; Elsie, 16; Gabriel, 14; Luke, 12; Leah, 8; Esther, 5 and James, 3. Naomi, 10, who has special needs, attends classes at Random Lake Elementary School, and Patrick, their baby, is seven months old. When they are not in class, the older children sometimes assist in the business by labeling and packaging coffee orders.

The business offers three products: specialty blends, available year-round, a combination of coffee from multiple regions: single origin, coffee from one location — usually from one harvest and one farmer. "This product is limited stock," he explained.

He also offers subscription products, beginning at \$15 per month. These consist of blends or single-origin coffees. "Subscriptions make great gifts," he said.

For an example of a seasonal blend, he described his latest product — "Nativity 2018." "This quality cup has sweetness with cinnamon and more than a hint of dark chocolate in the finish," he said.

There are many more blends. "Not sure which to try?" he asked. "Order a "Fearless Flight," and sample four selections of coffee."

The pastor points out on his website, <https://coffee.gillespie>, that great coffee motivates and inspires and that memories are often shared over a cup of coffee. He's discovered another benefit. "The skills I have learned from running a small business, such as marketing, apply to leading a congregation and school," he said.

Then too, he may have inherited some of his business acumen from his parents, Grace and Ron Gillespie, who reside on a 10-acre sheep farm, where he grew up in West Lafayette. His sister and brother-in-law run a small business, Maple Hills Naturals (<https://maplehillnaturals.com>).

"The products they harvest is for products offered in their small business," Gillespie said.

Grace, a media specialist and middle school teacher, will retire this year, and Ron has already retired. A large-animal veterinarian, he earned a Ph. D. degree in virology (science dealing with the study of viruses), and worked in

the diagnostic lab at Purdue University.

While wool is the focus of his family's business, he has chosen coffee production. Gillespie began drinking coffee while a student at Harrison High School in West Lafayette, unaware back then that Gillespie had been planted.

"At that time, a new coffee roaster opened up in my hometown, and the smoke billowing out onto Main Street every Tuesday haunted me," he recalls.

However, his interest in coffee remained dormant while he was a student at Concordia University - Chicago and for a few years after that. "I drank soda while I was in college," he said, adding that he met his wife at Concordia University.

Gillespie and Anne were married in 1998 in Chicago. He earned a bachelor's degree in communications from Concordia University in 2000, then spent five years retail sales. He sold high end stereos and home theaters for Audio Consultants, eventually ranking as the company's No. 2 salesman out of 40.

While serving as an elder for St. Paul's Lockport, Ill., he developed an interest in theology and church work, so in 2005, he entered Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind. He earned a master of divinity degree in 2009 and was ordained into the Holy Ministry on July 25, 2010. Prior to accepting a call to St. John Lutheran Church, he served congregations in Northwest Indiana and Chicago.

Meanwhile, as a seminary student, he had begun drinking coffee again. "It was a necessity for burning the midnight oil," he says.

During those years, he enjoyed a TV program, which featured Alton Brown, dubbed the "Mad Scientist of Cooking," on the Food Network.

Along with cooking and baking programs, coffee was a topic. At first, Gillespie researched coffee brewing online, then began brewing coffee with a French press. He also experimented with various stove-top makers, such as the Aeropress, a single-cup coffee maker, and pour-overs. Then too, he purchased a coffee grinder.

### Discovering the Process

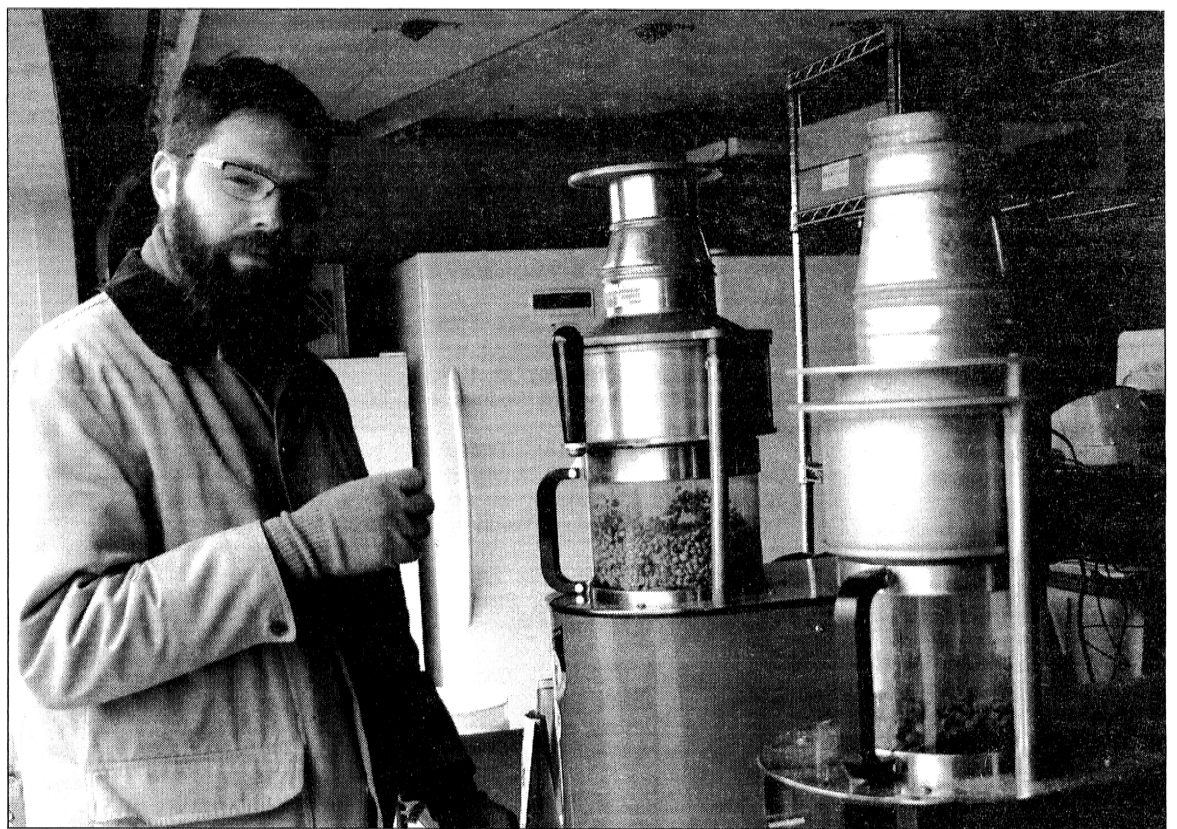
A light bulb moment spurred him on to the next step. "In 2014, I realized the only variable I had not tweaked was roasting my own coffee," the pastor said, explaining that coffee beans, green in color, grow like cherries on bushes and have to be processed and dried, producing a variety of flavors, dependent upon their origin.

"Coffee beans can only be grown in a narrow belt of the world — 800 miles north and south of the equator," he explains.

With a desire to roast his own coffee, five years ago, he tackled home roasting by hacking and burning through air poppers. "even though it was often frustrating and unreliable, I gained the tuned senses for a perfect roast," he recalled.

Later, he purchased his first reliable roaster, the Behmor 1600+, discovering amazing ranges of flavors and aromas with beans sourced from Sweet Maria's sample packs. After sharing his coffee with family members and friends, they encouraged him to start a coffee business, and the rest is history.

He roasts the coffee beans from a variety of countries. "I select the best raw coffee and roast it artfully," he said, adding descriptions of the hints of flavors and aromas from several types of



Pastor Christopher Gillespie has his two roasters working on two coffee varieties.

coffee from a variety of nations:

- Kenya — coffee with fruity hints
- Costa Rica — nutty and chocolate hints
- Sumatra — hints of toffee
- Ethiopia — (coffee's birthplace), fruity and lemony hints
- Guatemala — hints of raisins and figs
- Rwanda — hints of grapefruit and caramel
- Tanzania — berry flavors
- Java — earthy flavors

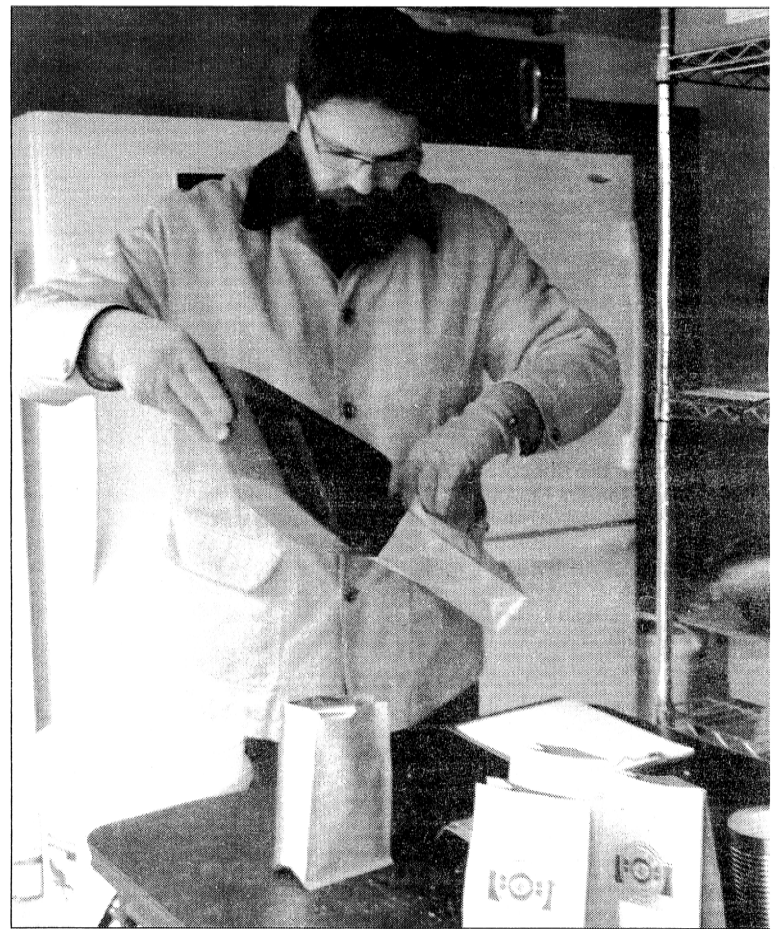
Gillespie roasts coffee two or three times per week and currently has about 150 customers who order coffee monthly, in addition to schools and churches on his list. Most order via his website.

"My goal is to give customers the most enjoyable tasting of coffees and teaching them how interesting coffee can be," he affirms.

As a full-time pastor, husband and father to nine children, he confessed that operating a hobby business can be stressful, due to the time crunch.

Coffee by Gillespie is available from \$16 for a 12-oz. bag or \$45 for a kilogram (three 12-oz. bags), and subscriptions start at \$15 per month.

For further information, or to place an order, visit <https://gillespie.coffee> or phone 219/440-1080.



Pastor Gillespie bags up a custom order.

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## Good Cooking!

Want to find those unique dinners, breakfasts, fish fries and brat fries — sponsored by non-profit organizations like churches, clubs, fire departments and others? **Check The Sounding Board on Page 10!**

Risen Hope Community Church invites YOU to their **11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF** Sunday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 4:00 - 6:30 pm in the Random Lake School Cafeteria

Donations received to benefit the **Random Lake Area Food Pantry**  
 This event is free to the public. Donations of non-perishable food items and/or monetary gifts are encouraged, all of which will go to the Random Lake Area Food Pantry. Chili will be served from 4:00 to 6:30 pm. For more information call (920) 838-2844.