

Saratoga Hot Dog Co. cart will open April 3

"Smoke signals will be filling the sky this Monday," a Sunday Facebook post announced

By Pam Abrams, *Times Union*

Published April 3, 2023



Kathy Kahl, at her Saratoga Hot Dog Company stand, readies for another season on Tuesday, March 21, 2023, on Excelsior Avenue in Saratoga, NY. (Jim Franco/Times Union)

This is the story of Kathy Kahl, a self-described “hot dog lady.” The entrepreneur is going into her 19th year of business running the beloved Saratoga Hot Dog Co. out of a parking lot. If you’ve taken a walk along Spring Run Trail, shopped at EBI — Eddy’s Beverage Inc. — or stopped by Saratoga Quality Hardware & Lumber on Excelsior Avenue at lunchtime, you’ve likely experienced the aroma wafting from Kahl’s smoker. These are seriously good wood-fired dogs.

Saratoga Hot Dog Co., aka Saratoga Awesome Dogs

Where: 112 Excelsior Ave. (in the Quality Hardware/EBI parking lot), Saratoga Springs

When: To open on or about March 31 (weather permitting). Hours: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekends

Facebook: [Saratoga Awesome Dogs](#)

From early spring to late fall, weather permitting, Kahl can be found behind her well-seasoned, steel-barrel open smoker, feeding cherry wood to the fire and taking orders from the shack: Awesome Dogs, kraut dogs, bratwurst, cheeseburgers.

A Sunday Facebook post announced the Saratoga Awesome Dogs cart would open Monday, April 3. "Red canopy was just put up!! Woohoo!!! We're looking forward to another season with Awesome company, amazing conversations, and seeing those familiar faces ... new ones welcome too!!"

The shack, which Kahl calls “the cart,” is the mobile, windowed headquarters where Kahl’s longtime friend and employee Linda Jordan takes orders, runs the cash register, dishes out the salads and serves up the drinks. Between them, you couldn’t ask for friendlier or more efficient service.

“Not only is the food great, but I enjoy the conversation with Kathy and Linda,” said Sackatoga Stable founder Jack Knowlton, a regular. Knowlton, owner of Tiz the Law and Funny Cide,

counts walking over to Kahl's hot dog stand multiple times a week among the season's most pleasurable traditions. "I usually order the Awesome Cheeseburger," he said, with no disrespect meant for the dogs.

Kahl's customers are CEOs and cardiologists, shop clerks and truck drivers. Susan DePaula, Sonny Bonaccio and other Saratoga boldface names trip off Kahl's tongue with no pretension. She's created an everyone's-welcome vibe at her stand, and the lines at lunchtime prove she's got a good thing going. "The dogs are \$3 and I'm not raising my prices," she said.

The congeniality over at her company, also known as Awesome Dogs, is fostered by the people who work there and the gathering of recurrent customers. Families and couples tend to share picnic tables under the tent behind the cart, while singles often congregate at the outdoor high-top near the smoker so they can chat with Kahl while she grills.

Fraternalizing is part of the appeal for Kahl in running a mobile business. "I love to cook and I love being outside – I have all my life," she said. Her commissary, where she preps her famous Awesome Meat Sauce, macaroni salad, and other menu items is down the road at the Gurtler Brother's VFW. "I get my meat fresh every day and start packing patties at 5 in the morning."



Kathy Kahl, at her Saratoga Hot Dog Company stand, readies for another season on Tuesday, March 21, 2023, on Excelsior Avenue in Saratoga, NY. (Jim Franco/Times Union)

Though she has her signature dishes, Kahl mixes things up from time to time. This season she's thinking about a riff on the Syracuse salt potato. "You boil mini potatoes in salt water to crystallize them, then serve them with dipping butter and salt on the side. I'm going to call them Saratoga Salt Potatoes. I have so many recipes swirling around up here," she says pointing to her head. "This is my passion."

When Kahl takes a day off she relies on her brother, Darryll Daum, to work the smoker. "There's an art to that," Kahl said, making it clear that she wouldn't leave it in just anybody's hands. Her younger daughter, Melissa, who is being groomed to take over the business someday, works the cart. Melissa also makes "Moe's Lemonade," hand-squeezed every morning and sold daily at the stand. Friend Charlene Metz works on weekends during the peak season.

These folks also helped keep the business running during challenging times. In 2019, an out-of-control car crossed Excelsior Avenue, came down the field next to the parking lot, and plowed into their cart. Kahl and Jordan were inside, loading up for the Travers, a weekend where they typically serve about 500 customers. “My head busted open, Linda broke her wrist, and the ‘caboose’ was totaled,” Kahl said referring to the old cart. Customers, friends, and family rallied with a GoFundMe campaign to raise money to buy a new cart, repair the steel smoker and see the women through their recoveries.

Then, in 2021, Kahl was diagnosed with breast cancer. “I thought I’d have to close,” she said. But once again her community came through. “I worked through the chemo,” said Kahl who reports being in full remission. “But life’s changed for me. Surviving a car wreck, surviving cancer ...” Kahl’s emotions get the better of her and she can’t quite finish her sentence. She gathers herself enough to say, “I’m just happy to be a simple hot dog lady.” But she knows, it’s not simple at all.

Kathy Kahl, at her Saratoga Hot Dog Company stand, displays some old photos of her stand as she readies for another season on Tuesday, March 21, 2023, on Excelsior Avenue in Saratoga, NY.