



Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: December 9, 2024

LEHR'S GERMAN SPECIALTIES

Application No.: LBR-2024-25-017
Business Name: Lehr's German Specialties
Business Address: 1581 Church St.
District: District 8
Applicant: Hannah Seyfert, Owner
Nomination Date: October 4, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Rafael Mandelman
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Lehr's German Specialties is San Francisco's sole specialty store dedicated to authentic German goods, establishing it as a unique destination in the city. The store was founded in 1974 by Boris and Brigitte Lehr, who immigrated from Germany to San Francisco in the 1950s. After Boris's passing in 2006, Brigitte continued to manage the store until her retirement in 2022 at the age of 87. When news of the impending closure reached Hannah Seyfert, a German expatriate and neighbor, she stepped in to purchase and rejuvenate Lehr's.

The store offers an extensive selection of imported groceries, including traditional foods, confections, beverages, as well as German cosmetics and magazines. Lehr's also provides a variety of festive items specifically for celebrations such as Easter, Oktoberfest, and Christmas. Lehr's supports local German-owned businesses by hosting pop-up events, enhancing its role as a cultural hub in the Noe Valley neighborhood.

Throughout its history, Lehr's has played a significant role in maintaining and nurturing the German heritage within San Francisco, offering a taste of home for German expatriates and a window into German culture for locals. The Church Street section of the Noe Valley neighborhood where the store is located was once known as Germantown due to its abundance of German cultural establishments. Lehr's remains the last German store in the area and continues to serve as a cultural and culinary bridge between San Francisco and Germany by celebrating traditional German holidays, offering German language publications, and hosting events that bring the community together.

CRITERION 1

Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

Yes, Lehr's German Specialties has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

1581 Church St. from 1974 to Present (50 years)

CRITERION 2

Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes, Lehr's German Specialties has contributed to the history and identity of the Noe Valley neighborhood and San Francisco.

Legacy Business Program

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City Hall Room 140
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San Francisco, CA 94102
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The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The business is associated with German and European cuisine and culture.
- There have been a number of features and articles on the store, including in German and English language publications, such as NBC Bay Area, SFGATE, and the Noe Valley Voice.
- With regard to racial and social equity, Lehr's German Specialties identifies as an immigrant- and woman-owned business and contributes to the cultural fabric of San Francisco through celebrating German cuisine and culture.

CRITERION 3

Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes, Lehr's German Specialties is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Lehr's German Specialties qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Authentic German culinary and cultural traditions.

CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Grocery store featuring German goods.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Lehr's German Specialties currently located at 1581 Church St. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

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Small Business Commission

Resolution No. _____

December 9, 2024

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Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Lehr's German Specialties, currently located at 1581 Church St.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 9, 2024, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Lehr's German Specialties in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Lehr's German Specialties.

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Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Authentic German culinary and cultural traditions.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Lehr's German Specialties on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Grocery store featuring German goods.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on December 9, 2024.

Katy Tang
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

Ayes –
Nays –
Abstained –
Absent –

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Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

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Business Address: 1581 Church St.
District: District 8
Applicant: Hannah Seyfert, Owner
Nomination Date: October 4, 2024
Nominated By: Supervisor Rafael Mandelman

CRITERION 1: Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

Yes No

1581 Church St. from 1974 to Present (50 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes No

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes No

NOTES: NA

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: October 9, 2024

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Member, Board of Supervisors
District 8



City and County of San Francisco

RAFAEL MANDELMAN

October 4, 2024

Re: Nomination of Lehr's to the Legacy Business Registry

Dear Director Tang,

I am writing this letter to enthusiastically recommend Lehr's German Specialties for inclusion in the Legacy Business Registry.

Lehr's has been a beloved business in Noe Valley since Boris and Brigitte Lehr set up shop in 1974. For five decades Lehr's has provided "homesick" expats and curious San Franciscans alike with one-of-a-kind imports from the "Heimat", ranging from sweet Marzipan and Lebkuchen to German bread and sausages.

Although Lehr's started out among a wider community of German stores and restaurants in an area of Noe Valley then known as "Germantown", over time, it became the last store in San Francisco that specializes in German food and culture. Brigitte Lehr, who had carried on the business after her husband's passing, announced her retirement in 2022 and with it, the abrupt closure of Lehr's.

Hannah Seyfert, a German expatriate and loyal customer, who like many others had been dismayed by the abrupt closure, reached out to Mrs. Lehr and together they planned out a path for Hannah to continue the legacy of Lehr's. Backed by Noe Valley residents and loyal customers traveling from as far as Sacramento and Lake Tahoe, Lehr's was able to reopen successfully in November 2022.

Lehr's German Specialties is a fixture of Noe's and San Francisco's small business communities and its continuous contributions to our city have, I believe, entitled it to the designation of Legacy Business.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rafael Mandelman".

Rafael Mandelman
Member, San Francisco Board of Supervisors



Legacy Business Registry Application



Business Information

Business name: Lehr's German Specialties

Business owner name(s): Hannah Seyfert

Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business

Current business address: 1581 Church St.

Telephone: (415) 341 - 0024 Email:

Mailing address (if different than above):

Website: www.lehrssf.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/lehrssf/ Twitter: N/A

7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN): 1 1 3 8 8 4 8

Do any of these describe your business? (select all that apply) Requires at least 51% of the business be owned, operated, and controlled by the business designation below.

- Immigrant-Owned Business
- LGBTQ+-Owned Business
- Minority-Owned Business*
- Owned by Person with a Disability
- Veteran-Owned Business
- Woman-Owned Business

*Minority is defined as one or more of the following racial or ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

Contact Person Information

Contact person name: Hannah Seyfert

Contact person title: Owner

Contact telephone: () - Contact email:

Business Location(s)

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business, and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business.

If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address.

Original San Francisco address: 1581 Church St. Zip Code: 94131

Is this location the founding location of the business? (Y/N): Y

Dates at this location: From: 1974 To: current

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other Address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Other address (if applicable): Zip Code:

Dates at this location: From: To:

Applicant Disclosures

San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Name: Hannah Seyfert

Signature:



Date: 4/20/24

LEHR'S GERMAN SPECIALTIES

Written Historical Narrative

INTRODUCTION

a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?

Lehr's German Specialties is San Francisco's sole specialty store dedicated to authentic German and European goods, establishing it as a unique and cherished destination in the city. The store offers an extensive selection of imported groceries, including traditional foods, confections, beverages, as well as German cosmetics and magazines. Lehr's also provides a variety of festive items specifically for celebrations such as Easter, Oktoberfest, and Christmas.

Committed to community engagement, Lehr's supports local German-owned businesses by hosting pop-up events, enhancing its role as a cultural hub. Through its diverse offerings, Lehr's connects locals and expatriates alike to the rich culinary and cultural traditions of Germany, opening doors to new flavors and experiences.

b. Describe whom the business serves.

Lehr's German Specialties not only serves the immediate neighborhoods of San Francisco but also attracts a variety of customers from much farther afield due to its unique offerings of authentic German and European goods. The store draws a diverse clientele, including expatriates from Germany and other European countries, food enthusiasts keen on exploring international cuisines, and local residents in search of unique and authentic grocery items and gifts.

Among these dedicated patrons is a 91-year-old man from Sacramento who regularly drives himself to Lehr's, citing the importance of staying active and engaging with community spaces. Similarly, an elderly German couple from Nevada City frequently visits to stock up on their favorite marzipan, a testament to the store's ability to offer hard-to-find traditional European treats. Another loyal customer from San Jose, whose mother was German, rents a car specifically to make the trip to Lehr's, highlighting the deep personal connections that motivate their customers to return. Additionally, a couple from Los Angeles makes it a point to visit Lehr's every year during San Francisco's Pride weekend, marking their first stop in the city as a ritual that combines cultural celebration with a touch of nostalgia and heritage.

These stories illustrate not only the broad regional appeal of Lehr's German Specialties but also the deep emotional and cultural ties that the store fosters with its customers. This customer base includes people of all ages who share a common appreciation for quality, authenticity, and the cultural richness that Lehr's brings to their lives.

Recognizing the broad appeal of its offerings and the geographical diversity of its customer base, Lehr's has also introduced delivery services within San Francisco and is expanding its

reach with shipping options across the United States. This commitment to accessibility ensures that more customers can enjoy the rich cultural and culinary delights Lehr's has to offer, no matter where they are located.

c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.

German and European specialties.

CRITERION 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years

a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.

Lehr's German Specialties was established in 1974 by Boris and Brigitte Lehr, who immigrated from Germany to San Francisco in the 1950s. Lehr's has proudly stood at 1581 Church Street in Noe Valley since its opening.

The outer Church Street section of the Noe Valley neighborhood, where Lehr's German Specialties is located, was once known as Germantown due to its abundance of German cultural establishments. Lehr's remains the last German store in the area, continuing to serve as a cultural and culinary bridge between San Francisco and Germany.

After Boris's passing in 2006, Brigitte continued to manage the store until her retirement in 2022 at the age of 87.

When news of the impending closure reached Hannah Seyfert, a German expatriate and neighbor, she stepped in to purchase and rejuvenate Lehr's. Following extensive remodeling, the store reopened in November 2022, preserving its legacy as a cherished destination for German specialties in San Francisco.

b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.

| | |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1974 to 2006: | Boris and Brigitte Lehr |
| 2006 to 2022: | Brigitte Lehr |
| 2022 to date: | Hannah Seyfert |

c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.

Lehr's German Specialties remained open during the COVID pandemic in 2020, but the store hours were adjusted and closed earlier than usual – at 3:00 p.m. on most days.

The business was closed from September 1 to November 26, 2022, for the remodel.

CRITERION 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community

a. Describe the business' contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community, business sector, or San Francisco as a whole.

Lehr's German Specialties holds a unique place in the cultural and historical fabric of San Francisco as the last remaining German specialty store in the city. Established in 1974 in what was then known as Germantown, Lehr's has long been a cornerstone of the Noe Valley neighborhood, which was once a hub for German expatriates and housed various German businesses including restaurants, theaters, and bookstores.

Throughout its history, Lehr's has played a significant role in maintaining and nurturing the German heritage within San Francisco, offering a taste of home for German expatriates and a window into German culture for locals. As other German establishments closed over the years, Lehr's continued to serve as a cultural bridge, celebrating traditional German holidays, offering German language magazines, and hosting events that brought the community together.

The store's commitment to providing authentic German and European goods — from food products to festive decorations — has made it a beloved destination not only for those seeking nostalgia or cultural connection but also for culinary enthusiasts eager to explore international flavors. Lehr's German Specialties is more than a store; it is a living archive of the German community's impact on San Francisco, preserving a legacy of cultural exchange and communal spirit in the heart of Noe Valley.

b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?

Lehr's German Specialties is particularly bustling during cultural festivals and events like Easter, Oktoberfest, and Christmas when demand for traditional German products peaks.

c. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

Lehr's German Specialties actively demonstrates a deep commitment to its community through multiple impactful initiatives, reinforcing its role far beyond just a retail operation.

The store consistently donates gift certificates and gift baskets to local school auctions, significantly supporting educational fundraising efforts. Additionally, it contributes leftover food to homeless shelters, effectively addressing both community welfare and waste reduction.

The store's owner is an active member of the community association Upper Noe Neighbors, further embedding the business within the local fabric. This involvement allows the store to stay connected with neighborhood issues and initiatives, ensuring that Lehr's remains a responsive and integral part of the community. Furthermore, Lehr's maintains an active membership in the German Ladies' General Benevolent Society, founded in 1870. The society's mission is to provide short-term emergency financial assistance and support to women and

children of German origin or heritage who reside in the Bay Area. Through its affiliation, Lehr's hosts numerous events that not only strengthen cultural bonds but also serve as valuable social gatherings, supporting the society's goals and enriching the community.

Through these diverse actions, Lehr's German Specialties not only functions as a business but also as a vital community pillar that supports and enriches its neighborhood and the broader San Francisco community.

d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?

Following are several key media references for Lehr's German Specialties:

- ***Heimat und Erinnerungen***
Lebensmittel Zeitung
November 3, 2023
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g6Ov2qAbggzGgSAITQ51fr7ICGjX1UIK/view>
- ***Store Trek: Lehr's German Specialties***
Noe Valley Voice
November 2023
<https://www.lehrssf.com/uploads/b/39b600a0-0bf8-11ee-87e0-51c578f9aef2/202311.pdf>
- ***Lehr's on ARD Brisant***
YouTube, posted by [Lehr's German Specialties](#)
August 14, 2023
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrGZj6pFh64&t=1s>
- ***50-year-old San Francisco German specialty store saved by loyal customer***
SFGATE
February 1, 2023
<https://www.sfgate.com/food/article/san-francisco-german-specialty-store-17751637.php>
- ***Butterkekse und Heimatgefühl***
Welt
December 22, 2022
https://www.welt.de/newsticker/dpa_nt/infoline_nt/panorama_nt/article242830411/Butterkekse-und-Heimatgefuehl.html

- ***Noe Valley Institution Saved From Closing by Loyal Customer***
NBC Bay Area
October 4, 2022
<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/bay-area-proud/noe-valley-institution-saved-from-closing-by-loyal-customer/3021554/>
- ***San Francisco German store saved by loyal customer, will reopen this fall in Noe Valley***
SFGATE
September 22, 2022
<https://www.sfgate.com/food/article/sf-lehrs-german-store-saved-17455624.php>
- ***Looking for Germantown / A mix of cultures, boundaries along Outer Church Street***
SFGATE
June 6, 2004
<https://www.sfgate.com/magazine/article/Looking-for-Germantown-A-mix-of-cultures-2715339.php>

e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?

Lehr's German Specialties has been recognized for its contributions to the community and its commitment to preserving and promoting German culture in San Francisco. In May 2023, the store was honored with a Certificate of Honor by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

f. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?

If Lehr's German Specialties were to close, the impact on the community and San Francisco at large would be significant. As the last remaining German specialty store in the city, its closure would mean the loss of a vital cultural and culinary resource that has served the city since 1974.

The neighborhood of Noe Valley, where Lehr's has been a staple, would lose a unique establishment that not only provides authentic German and European goods but also fosters cultural connections. The store's absence would leave a gap not easily filled by other local businesses, as it offers specialized products that are otherwise difficult to find in the area.

San Francisco would lose a piece of its diverse cultural tapestry, which includes a variety of ethnic and specialty stores that contribute to the city's rich, multicultural identity. Lehr's acts as more than just a grocery store; it is a cultural institution that educates and connects people through the shared love of German food and traditions.

Furthermore, the closure of Lehr's would directly affect its three employees, leaving them without work. These employees, who have contributed to the store's friendly and knowledgeable service, would need to seek employment elsewhere in a challenging economic environment.

Customers, particularly German expatriates and those with an affinity for German cuisine, would lose a cherished source of goods like German breads, sausages, and holiday specialties. They would be hard-pressed to find another local store offering a similar array of products and the same level of authenticity.

In summary, the closure of Lehr's German Specialties would represent a loss not just of a retail store, but of a community hub that brings together people, cultures, and traditions. It would diminish the neighborhood's diversity of offerings and impact the broader San Francisco community's access to German cultural goods.

CRITERION 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business

a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?

Not applicable.

b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.

Lehr's German Specialties is committed to maintaining authentic German culinary and cultural traditions.

c. What is the plan to keep the business open in the long term beyond the current ownership?

The long-term plan for Lehr's German Specialties is to ensure its sustained operation and cultural significance by potentially transitioning ownership to committed family members or dedicated community stakeholders. This approach aims to preserve the store's heritage and its role as a key provider of German culinary traditions in San Francisco.

The current owner plans to identify and nurture successors who are passionate about maintaining the store's unique character and values. By keeping the business within the family or passing it on to a like-minded member of the community, Lehr's can continue to thrive under leadership that deeply understands and values its cultural importance.

This strategy ensures that Lehr's remains a cherished institution, celebrating German heritage and continuing to serve as a cultural and culinary bridge for future generations in San Francisco.

d. What challenges is the business facing today?

Lehr's German Specialties, like many other small businesses in San Francisco, faces several challenges that impact its operation and sustainability. Recently, they have encountered issues with vandalism, break-in attempts, and petty theft. These incidents not only cause financial strain due to damage and loss of goods but also affect the sense of security within the store and among their employees and customers.

To address these challenges and support the longevity of legacy businesses like Lehr's, they would benefit from targeted programs designed by the Office of Small Business. Initiatives could include enhanced security measures, such as improved lighting around business premises, access to subsidized security systems, or even community policing efforts. Additionally, assistance programs to help cover the costs of repairs and strengthen preventive measures would be invaluable.

Providing these forms of support would help ensure that legacy businesses can continue to operate without the constant threat of external damages, thereby maintaining their cultural and economic contributions to the community.

Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:

a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.

Grocery store featuring German products.

b. Other special features of the business location, such as if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.

The Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the building at 1579-1581 Church Street is "B - Unknown / Age Eligible." Per the Neighborhood Commercial Corridors Survey (Unadopted) in 2015, the building "does not appear significant under Criterion C/3 (Architecture/Design)."

Lehr's
HEIMAT SINCE 1974

GERMAN
SPECIALTIES



GERMAN
SPECIALTIES

1581

EIN
PROSIT

OKTOBERFEST

Lehr's
HEIMAT SINCE 1974

OZAPPT IS!

BIER
BRAU
SET







JEMBO \$7.25



JEMBO \$11.35



BUTTER SHORT \$2.79

JEMBO \$3.85

BUTTER SHORT \$2.75



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STORE TREK

Store Trek is a regular Voice feature, spotlighting new stores and businesses in Noe Valley. We have announced Lehr's revival in past stories and Rumors Behind the News. But here's a closer look at the unique specialty store and its enthusiastic new owner.

LEHR'S GERMAN SPECIALTIES
1581 Church Street
(415) 341-0024
<https://lehrssf.com/>

Unlike last year, when Hannah Seyfert reopened Lehr's German Specialties on Nov. 27 less than a month before Christmas, this holiday season she has had months to prepare for the all-important shopping season. She started stocking items for the upcoming holidays in October and will be rolling out even more in the weeks ahead.

She is selling more than 20 varieties of stollen, a German Christmas bread (starting at \$7.99), and lebkuchen, traditional German gingerbread (starting at \$5.99). Especially popular is the Niederegger marzipan, an almond-flavored candy (starting at \$4.99), while Seyfert encourages patrons to also try the Spekulatius, cinnamon-spiced cookies (starting at \$6.99).

"It is very important, and thankfully last year everything came together," Seyfert said of the holiday shopping season. "It will be a big time for us again."

New this year for customers of the beloved shop at 1581 Church St. is a station where people can select various small chocolates to use as treats in advent calendars, or they can purchase pre-filled ones (starting at \$9.99). Also available are tea Advent calendars (\$12.49) and picture Advent calendars (\$12.99).

The shop is also selling a variety of gift items, from candleholders (starting at \$20) and nutcrackers (starting at \$80) to ornaments (\$5 and up). One holiday gift comes from the Ore Mountains near the Czech-German border and is known as a "German smoker." It's like a nutcracker, but the figure's mouth is used to burn incense (starting at \$40).

"All of our wooden Christmas decorations are handcrafted in Germany. We will offer exclusive, hard-to-find items in limited quantities," said Seyfert. "Some of the ornaments have 50+ pieces assembled and painted by hand. Purchases are supporting German artists as well (many are old or have disabilities)."

Preserving a Legacy

Seyfert, who grew up in Hanover, Germany, had been a regular of Lehr's since moving to San Francisco in 2016 to be with her husband, Alex. They had first met in 2009 when they were roommates in Chemnitz, Germany.

He ended up moving to the Bay Area a decade ago to pursue a career in the tech sector, but the two kept in touch. Their friendship evolved into a relationship, and after three years of dating long distance, they wed.

After learning that the original owner, Brigitte Lehr, planned to shutter the store after 48 years in business, Seyfert couldn't imagine going without the hard-to-find German treats that Lehr stocked. Out of the blue she called up Lehr about taking over the business.

"I would not know where else to get



Lehr's owner Hannah Seyfert says Friday is the day she receives her shipment of breads and pastries from Hahdough German bakery in Hayes Valley. The fresh pretzels arrive on Saturday.

Photo by Art Bodner

my sausages and bread. I was panicking when I learned Brigitte was closing," Seyfert said. "This place is a piece of *heimat*—home in German—for a lot of German expats. I am selling much more memories here than just food."

Lehr connected her to a real estate agent, who requested Seyfert submit a more formal proposal. While imbibing a few beers seated at the Valley Tavern's garden, Seyfert crafted a plan that won over Lehr.

They signed a contract for Seyfert to acquire the business, and last fall Seyfert set about remodeling the storefront. She and her husband were working there last Thanksgiving when several women who lived nearby and grew up going to the store stopped by to drop them off some turkey for dinner.

"I have been really happy about the support of the neighbors and the community," said Seyfert, who lives nearby at 24th and Diamond streets.

There was no point in changing the store's name, said Seyfert, since people knew and loved Lehr's. She kept the store's old sign and hung up old photos of it in honor of the store's history.

"Brigitte built a legacy here," she said. "It is the only German store in San Francisco."

Throughout the year, Seyfert stocks frozen breads (\$6.99 and up) shipped from Germany that can be found in the freezers on the right side of the store near the entrance. She also sells a variety of sausages (starting at \$11.79) from the Continental Gourmet Sausage Co. in Glendale, Calif. Customers looking for Wurstmeister Benz sausages from Germany can order them via Lehr's website.

On Fridays, she gets a shipment of fresh pastries from the Hahdough German bakery in Hayes Valley, while on Saturdays she sells pretzels from Berkeley-based Squabisch (\$4.49).

"They sell like crazy," said Seyfert.

A big surprise has been how popular the muesli is.

"A lot of Americans love it. It is a super quick and easy breakfast," she said.

About 35 percent of customers are

German transplants like herself. For the remaining 75 percent who may not speak the language, Seyfert recommends they use Google translate if they need to read the product labels that are in German only.

"It is nice to see how open people are

to experiencing new flavors and experiences," said Seyfert.

Santa brought a surprise of his own to the couple last December, when Seyfert learned she was pregnant.

"No, of course not!" Seyfert said when asked if the pregnancy had been planned. "We found out in mid-December when we were so busy. People wanted their Christmas goodies!"

The tipoff came when her mom, in town to help out at the store, noticed she was eating pickles.

"I never liked pickles," said Seyfert.

She and Alex now have an infant girl named Leni.

"She is our first baby. We are really happy," said Seyfert.

Taking time off to spend time with her daughter, Seyfert couldn't move forward this year on an idea she'd had to open a Yuletide, a Christmas market like the ones she grew up with in Germany. She told the *Voice* perhaps she would have time to do the market in 2024, likely somewhere in downtown San Francisco.

For now, Seyfert is working on being able to offer delivery this month via Door Dash. She has teamed up with Too Good to Go to sell packaged foods that have reached their expiration date but are still good (at a discounted price). Customers can place their order with the app and stop by the store to pick it up.

"Label dates are so misleading," said Seyfert, who helped launch the app's marketing in the city in 2021.

Lehr's is closed Mondays. The rest of the week it opens at 11 a.m. and closes at 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, 6 p.m. on Saturdays, and 5 p.m. on Sundays.

—Matthew S. Bajko



OMNIVORE BOOKS NOVEMBER EVENTS

| | |
|------------------|---|
| WED NOV 1 | PALAK PATEL IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVIA NOCEDA • THE CHUTNEY LIFE: 100 EASY-TO-MAKE INDIAN-INSPIRED RECIPES • 6:30 P.M. FREE! |
| SAT NOV 4 | JON KUNG • KUNG FOOD: CHINESE AMERICAN RECIPES FROM A THIRD-CULTURE KITCHEN • 3:00 P.M. FREE! Book release party and signing event! Everyone can come to have their book signed, purchase from us for priority in the signing line. |
| MON NOV 6 | JEREMY SCHECK • SCHECKEATS - COOKING SMARTER: FRIENDLY RECIPES WITH A SIDE OF SCIENCE • 6:30 P.M. FREE! A TikTok superstar's debut cookbook. |
| TUES NOV 7 | ERIN FRENCH • BIG HEART LITTLE STOVE: BRINGING HOME MEALS & MOMENTS FROM THE LOST KITCHEN • 4:30 P.M. FREE! Book signing event! Everyone can come to have their book signed, purchase from us for priority in the signing line. |
| SAT NOV 11 | CAREY JONES & JOHN MCCARTHY • EVERY COCKTAIL HAS A TWIST: MASTER 25 CLASSIC DRINKS AND CRAFT MORE THAN 200 VARIATIONS • 3:30 P.M. FREE! |
| SUN NOV 12 | JORDAN MICHELMAN & ZACHARY CARLSEN • BUT FIRST, COFFEE: A GUIDE TO BREWING FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE BAR • 3:00 P.M. FREE! |
| MON NOV 13 | FUCHSIA DUNLOP • INVITATION TO A BANQUET: THE STORY OF CHINESE FOOD • 6:30 P.M. FREE! A celebrated author weaves decades of culinary experience and on-the-ground research into a spellbinding book about Chinese cuisine. |

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50-year-old San Francisco German specialty store saved by loyal customer



Lehr's German Specialties new owner Hannah Seyfert holds some of the german food items available at her store in the Noe Valley of San Francisco, Calif. on Jan. 29, 2023.
Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE

By **Steph Rodriguez**, Food Editor
Updated Feb 1, 2023 12:24 p.m.



When Lehr's German Specialties [abruptly closed its doors last August](#) after nearly 50 years as San Francisco's dedicated shop for hard-to-find German brands and imported treats — it didn't stay closed for long.

Hannah Seyfert, a loyal customer who moved to San Francisco from Germany in 2016, often frequented Lehr's for a taste of "heimat," or home. She took comfort in the little specialty shop on Church Street that carried all of the familiar brands she's enjoyed since childhood. So when it closed, she called its owner, Brigitte Lehr, and made her an offer.

After months of renovating the space, including new flooring, fresh coats of paint and restocking the aisles with all of her favorite fruit jams, cheese sausages, crusty breads, artisan chocolates and stinky cheeses, [Seyfert reopened Lehr's in late November](#) that same year and welcomed back customers from the neighborhood and beyond.



A picture attached to the pole shows the difference of the interior of Lehr's German Specialties from its original owners and how it looks now under the new ownership of Hannah Seyfert in the Noe Valley of San Francisco, Calif. on Jan. 29, 2023.
Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE

“All over the store, we have these little pictures to show how it would've looked like six months ago if you were standing here,” said Seyfert, as she pointed to a small, framed photograph tacked to a pole. “It's like a memory lane and it's important for us to show that the store has a very long history.”

Since [Lehr's](#) reopened, Seyfert said customers trek all the way from Tahoe, Nevada City and Sacramento. One

couple from Santa Barbara didn't even stop to check into their hotel — their first stop was Lehr's.

“We've been so crazy busy, I'm just hoping we can keep up with that,” Seyfert said. “We're working on the web shop right now, so customers from everywhere else can order.”



(Left clockwise) Hannah Seyfert, Brigitte Lehr, and Ingrid (Courtesy of Hannah Seyfert); Lehr's Original Sign; Photo of Brigitte and Boris Lehr (Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE)



Lehr's was originally founded in 1953 by Hans Speckmann, known as the man behind Speckmann's, a former German deli and bierstube on Church Street. It changed hands in the mid-1970s when Lehr took over the German specialty store with her late husband.

Seyfert told SFGATE there are many old posters and photographs left over from the original Lehr's that were handed down to her, and she intends to hang them soon to complete the store.

And although you can still smell the fresh paint and there isn't a speck of dust to be found, Seyfert shows her respect for the store's history by also hanging the old Lehr's sign above the doorway so customers, new and returning, can get a glimpse of the past.



A customer walks into Lehr's German Specialties in the Noe Valley of San Francisco, Calif. on Jan. 29, 2023.
Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE

“Usually, the first reaction is really, ‘Wow! This looks really different,’” she said. “I would say 98% of people are really excited, and really happy about how it looks. It’s easier to navigate, they can find things easier, there is more space for moms with strollers, for example.”

During my Tuesday afternoon visit before Lehr’s opened for the day, many eager customers popped in to say hello to Seyfert and see if they could start shopping.

“One customer came in, and he said he grew up in Milwaukee, where there’s a large German community, and he said he remembers all these things from his childhood and he was just really happy about getting that memory back and it makes me happy to provide that,” Seyfert said.

“One customer came in, and he said he grew



(Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE)

These enthusiastic shoppers are stopping by for specialty items not carried at regular big box stores, such as fresh-baked loaves of bread that are handmade in Hamburg, Germany. Every Wednesday, Seyfert stocks the loaves front and center, and they sell out quickly. The loaves come

par-baked, so customers can finish baking at home and fill their kitchens with the warm, toasty aromas of fresh graubrot (crusty bread).

“The sausages are also incredibly popular. My supplier, he can’t keep up with my demand,” Seyfert said.

One delicious variety carried at Lehr’s is the kasekrainer, a smoked sausage with cubes of melted cheese throughout. They come frozen, but once cooked fresh at home, the first bite is met with that satisfying snap from the sausage casing, followed by sharp notes of creamy cheddar cheese. Seyfert said she orders about 10 times the amount of sausages previously carried in the store just to keep up with her customers’ appetites. She also carries the brand Wurstmeister Benz, a small sausage maker near the Sierra Nevada Foothills, on the first and third Saturdays of the month.

“We’re trying to focus on local as much as we can,” Seyfert said. “Obviously, most of the stuff is from Germany, and it’s hard to get locally. But if we can, we do.”



Lehr's German Specialties new owner Hannah Seyfert helps a customer search for candies at Lehr's German Specialties in the Noe Valley of San Francisco, Calif. on Jan. 29, 2023.

Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE

A trip through the well-curated aisles at Lehr’s also reveals plenty of fruit jams, such as plum butter, apple jelly and rosehip with its sweet floral notes. There are artisan chocolates flecked in gold leaf by Goldhelm Schokolade, crispy butter biscuit cookies that many families would give their children after school and even familiar brands like Haribo, but imported from Deutschland and made without corn syrups.

Seyfert also hangs QR codes next to certain German pantry staples such as dry egg noodles, pickled white asparagus and sour cherries. The codes lead to recipes, so that customers can try their hand at new flavors and learn how to incorporate these ingredients at home.

Besides pantry goods, Seyfert carries an array of German cheeses. From the strong, aromatic limburger to spreadable butter cheese, smoked or flavored with beer, it's all stocked at Lehr's from small German companies that specialize in the craft.

"It's passing on your culture. The easiest way to make people understand your culture is always food," Seyfert told SFGATE. "So that was the main driver for me to continue the business and just continue showing what German food is like, and making that food and how that food makes people happy."



(Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE)

On Fridays, Seyfert carries baked goods by [Hahndough](#), a San Francisco bakery dedicated to German recipes such as the classic bee sting cake, a double-layer confection with vanilla cream and topped with a honey-almond crunch. Customers are also after Berliners, a wildly popular berry jam- or cream-filled spongy doughnut dusted in powdered sugar.

Another must-have bite at Lehr's are the German-style pretzels by [Squabisch](#), a family-owned shop in Berkeley. Owner Sabine Herrmann told SFGATE she met Seyfert at an event where she was selling her hand-twisted pretzels and the two instantly bonded over their love for German food and culture.

On Saturdays, Seyfert’s customers expect their Squabisch delivery of Asiago and classic-flavored pretzels as well as pudgy pretzel rolls dusted with sea salt. Lehr’s is currently the only store in the city that sells these small-batch varieties, which don’t stay stocked for long.



Lehr's German Specialties new owner Hannah Seyfert poses with some of the german food items available at her store in the Noe Valley of San Francisco, Calif. on Jan. 29, 2023.
Douglas Zimmerman/SFGATE

As Seyfert prepared to open Lehr’s during my visit, she took a deep breath as she surveyed the new space with a great sense of pride. Her mother, who was visiting from Germany, said owning her own specialty store has always been her daughter’s dream. Seyfert nodded, and added she aims to be a place that uplifts small German makers like Squabisch and Hahdough, but also wants to remind others like her that home isn’t too far away.

“Food is always linked to memories and to the people who gave that food to you. So for me, this is home,” Seyfert said.

Feb 1, 2023 | Updated Feb 1, 2023 12:24 p.m.

Steph Rodriguez

FOOD EDITOR

Steph Rodriguez is the former food editor for SFGATE. Her food writing has been recognized by the California News Publishers Association as well as the Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California.



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: November 6, 2024

Filing Date: October 9, 2024
Case No.: 2024-009213LBR
Business Name: Lehr's German Specialties
Business Address: 1581 CHURCH ST
Zoning: NC-1 (NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL, CLUSTER) Zoning District
Central Neighborhoods Large Residence Special Use District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Cultural District: Not Applicable
Block/Lot: 6600/039
Applicant: Hannah Seyfert
1581 Church Street
Nominated By: Supervisor Rafael Mandelman
Located In: District 8
Staff Contact: Honora Montano - 628-652-7402
Honora.Montano@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

Lehr's German Specialties is San Francisco's sole specialty store dedicated to authentic German and European goods, establishing it as a unique destination in the city. The store was founded in 1974 by Boris and Brigitte Lehr, who immigrated from Germany to San Francisco in the 1950s. After Boris's passing in 2006, Brigitte continued to manage the store until her retirement in 2022 at the age of 87. When news of the impending closure reached Hannah Seyfert, a German expatriate and neighbor, she stepped in to purchase and rejuvenate Lehr's.

The store offers an extensive selection of imported groceries, including traditional foods, confections, beverages, as well as German cosmetics and magazines. Lehr's also provides a variety of festive items specifically for celebrations such as Easter, Oktoberfest, and Christmas. Lehr's supports local German-owned businesses by hosting pop-up events, enhancing its role as a cultural hub in the Noe valley neighborhood. Throughout its history, Lehr's has played a significant role in maintaining and nurturing the German heritage within San Francisco,

offering a taste of home for German expatriates and a window into German culture for locals. The Church Street section of the Noe Valley neighborhood where the store is located was once known as Germantown due to its abundance of German cultural establishments. Lehr's remains the last German store in the area and continues to serve as a cultural and culinary bridge between San Francisco and Germany by celebrating traditional German holidays, offering German language publications, and hosting events that bring the community together.

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. When was business founded?

The business was founded in 1974.

2. Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?

Yes. Lehr's German Specialties qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Lehr's German Specialties has operated continuously in San Francisco for 50 years.
- b. Lehr's German Specialties has contributed to the history and identity of the Noe Valley neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Lehr's German Specialties is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. Is the business associated with a culturally significant art / craft / cuisine / tradition?

Yes. The business is associated with German and European cuisine and culture.

4. Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and / or architecture?

No.

5. Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?

No.

6. Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?

No.

7. Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?

Yes. There have been a number of features and articles on the store, including in German and English language publications, such NBC Bay Area, SF Gate, and The Noe Valley Voice.

Racial and Social Equity Analysis

On July 15th, 2020 the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted [Resolution No. 1127](#) centering Preservation Planning on racial and social equity. Understanding the benefits, burdens, and opportunities to advance racial and social equity that proposed Preservation Planning documents provide is part of the Department's Racial and Social Equity Initiative. This is also consistent with the Mayor's Citywide Strategic Initiatives for equity and accountability and with the Office of Racial Equity, which required all Departments to conduct this analysis.

The Legacy Business Program is deeply intertwined with these goals. One of the primary purposes of the Legacy Business Program is to maintain San Francisco's cultural fabric and to foster civic engagement and pride by assisting long-operating businesses remain in the city. The Legacy Business Registry was established to recognize longstanding, community-serving businesses that are valuable cultural assets of the city. These businesses, ranging from restaurants to art galleries to tire shops to community shelters, are key to sustaining the racial and social diversity in San Francisco and adding to the identity and character of our city and the many communities within it.

Lehr's German Specialties identifies as an immigrant and woman-owned business and contributes to the cultural fabric of San Francisco through celebrating German cuisine and culture.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

Current Locations:

- 1581 Church Street (1974 – Present)

Recommended by Applicant

- Authentic German culinary and cultural traditions

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
 - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
 - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History

- Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DRAFT RESOLUTION NO.

HEARING DATE: November 6, 2024

Filing Date: October 9, 2024
Case No.: 2024-009213LBR
Business Name: Lehr's German Specialties
Business Address: 1581 CHURCH ST
Zoning: NC-1 (NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL, CLUSTER) Zoning District
 Central Neighborhoods Large Residence Special Use District
 40-X Height and Bulk District

Cultural District: Not Applicable
Block/Lot: 6600/039
Applicant: Hannah Seyfert
 1581 Church Street

Nominated By: Supervisor Rafael Mandelman
Located In: District 8
Staff Contact: Honora Montano - 628-652-7402
Honora.Montano@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR LEHR'S GERMAN SPECIALTIES LOCATED AT 1581 CHURCH STREET, BLOCK/LOT 6600/039.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on November 6, 2024, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** that Lehr's German Specialties qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby** recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Lehr's German Specialties.

Locations

Current Locations:

- 1581 Church Street (1974 – Present)

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

- Authentic German culinary and cultural traditions

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs** its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file to the Office of Small Business on November 6, 2024.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

RECUSE:

ADOPTED: November 6, 2024.