



After months of anticipation, it seems that Vortex Doughnuts is making progress toward a promised grand opening in its South Slope space on National Doughnut Day, June 6. Owners Ron and Valerie Patton plan to completely renovate a corner of the large, brick building at 32 Banks Ave., which previously housed a paper warehouse and wooden-floored roller rink. The project will involve knocking out a major section of the front wall and raising the sunken floor up to street level.

The Pattons say they are still working out details with architects, engineers, equipment vendors and city permitting, so they are not yet able to determine when they will be ready for what they hope will be the start of a long soft opening this spring. However, they are interviewing applicants for the post of pastry chef, and last week they announced that local coffee aficionado Zachariah Acquaviva-Brown has been hired as the shop's head barista.

"He's very well-known in Asheville," says Ron of Acquaviva-Brown. "Very seldom have I ever run across someone who is so passionate about what he does. Zachariah takes the 'do what you love and you'll do great at it' mantra to a whole new level. He loves all things coffee. He wears coffee on his sleeves — metaphorically and literally. He's a great catch for us, and we're thrilled to have him at Vortex as our head barista."

Acquaviva-Brown started his career as a barista at age 17 in Washington state. He is educated as a barista trainer, is a certified La Marzocco Espresso technician and says he has competed in numerous barista competitions and "latte art throwdowns." Since moving to Asheville, he has been doing service and sales support for 1000 Faces Coffee of Athens, Ga., which he says includes "barista training, cafe support and general coffee geekery."

"I am a foodie," says Acquaviva-Brown, "and I love the narrative around coffee. We are here to perfect the pairing of coffee and doughnuts."

Vortex will feature 1000 Faces Coffee as its house brand along with a rotating selection of products by Asheville-area roasters. Other drink offerings will include house-made sodas mixed with locally made Blue Blazes Soda syrups, Buchi kombucha and cold-brew coffees and teas.

In other news, the Pattons have collaborated with Greg and Ashley Garrison of The Hop to create a new Vortex-themed ice cream flavor. According to Ashley, the premiere batch features chunks of cinnamon-sugar doughnut swirled with Vortex Ring of Fire pepper-jelly sauce in vanilla ice cream for a sweet and "slightly spicy" effect. Future batches may use other sauce flavors, including Squeal Sauce, which won awards at Blue Ridge Food Ventures' BaconFest last summer. The Hop plans to release its new concoction on Jan. 15.