



## community development partnership

*Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape*

### After a flood: Turning wreckage into a reboot

***“I knew then it was going to be life changing.”***

*Katie Reed, Chequessett Chocolate*



It was January. After months of preparation, it was time to load up the pallets for Chequessett Chocolate’s winter adventure. They were taking their made-in-Truro wares and three staff members to an international craft chocolate festival in Tokyo.

Katie Reed remembers leaving work at about 11:00 p.m. Sometime between then and early morning, when her business partner Josiah Mayo opened the door to their chocolate factory on Highland Road, a valve had cracked in the washing machine in the apartments upstairs. The place was flooded.

Standing in their newly reconfigured shop, Katie says, “I knew then it was going to be life changing.”

“But I’ve always thought that gratitude can shift your perspective,” she says. “So we’re looking at this as the reboot we needed.”

At the five-year mark, Katie and Josiah were just about to pay off the CDP microloan that helped them launch the business. They were thinking about next steps for sustainable growth and looking forward to working on their branding.

The long view went on hold. But they decided to go forward with the event in Tokyo; after all, they had already invested in it. They called Cape Associates in Eastham, hoping they would have the capacity to salvage things quickly.

Katie and Josiah had met Matt Cole, President of Cape Associates, at CDP events. Katie knew he was on the CDP’s board of directors. But her next steps still took some nerve.

“The place had been shin-deep, and water had saturated the walls and ceiling on its way down. They came with moisture meters. Then we signed a demo contract so that they could tear our business down while we were away. We came back to bare studs.” Katie said.

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Talking about this, Katie is the very picture of resilience. Some of that, she says, is in her upbringing. Some of it she learned on the job.

Katie says the company's resilience is also thanks to being a part of a supportive community.

“Cape Associates did a fantastic job here, going from demo to reconstructed space so fast. And they've stood by us while we wait for insurance funds to come through. I think our connection to the CDP helped them have faith in us,” she says.

Then there's the help that came from being in a neighborhood that includes some light industry. Ethan Poulin's landscaping team across the way plows them out. And next door there's Grozier Square, where owner Joel Grozier works on classic cars.

“I don't know how any chocolate factory gets by without a good mechanic nearby,” Katie says. “We go over there for the most esoteric tool and he'll have it. He has rescued our machines so many times.”

The need to rebuild allowed Katie and Josiah to look at their space differently. They focused on the positive: this was a good time to improve the layout of both the café and their production area. They also made revisions to bring the factory into compliance with new Food Safety Modernization Act regulations.

Chequessett Chocolate was up and running again by the end of May and their recovery has been steady.

Things are busy inside the shop now, with summer visitors and locals gathered and gabbing over coffee. In the front lot is a food truck, High Tide Kitchen, which they added this summer as an homage to the flavors they've loved on travels in Southeast Asia.



Summer is actually the slow season for those in the world of chocolate, which is in high demand during the winter holidays. That has given Katie and Josiah the time they needed to begin recovering their longer-term vision for the business.

“We are making as much really good chocolate as we can right now—our machines are running 24 hours a day,” Katie says. “Now I think we're positioned to make more chocolate *and* better chocolate.”

They know this will mean choosing to reinvest in equipment and in people in the right ways.

As a start, they have embraced their reverse seasonality, making sure people know how to do a lot of different jobs. You can be pretty sure your barista at Chequessett Chocolate has done cross training on fulfilling online orders. Cultivating the e-commerce side of the business opens the door to year-round staffing—theoretically, a good thing for staff.

Except for the problem of housing.

“That's the next big challenge,” Katie says, because the cost of housing on the Outer Cape is beyond the good wages the shop is committed to paying.



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Having turned wreckage into a reboot, Katie and Josiah seem not at all surprised to be rolling up their sleeves to problem-solve again.

“One thing we learned from the regular business counseling that came with our CDP microloan,” Josiah says, “was to see that our problems would change over time.”

Their way of assessing the situation reflects their experience with coming through the flood. They’re starting with gratitude and feeling the strength of community. The two agree they have a lot going for them as far as staff is concerned. They enjoy working together.

“We really are a kind of community,” Katie says, “and that’s part of what keeps us inspired.”

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