

# Deseret News

## Dispute shakes up One World cafe

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A Salt Lake restaurant that was based on the altruistic model that diners pay what they can afford has adopted a standard business model after a labor dispute. The restaurant's chef/manager was fired and its employees walked off the job last month.

That doesn't mean that One World Everybody Eats is closing or abandoning its original mission, founder and owner Denise Cerreta said Friday. The cafe at 300 East and South Temple and the nonprofit agency behind it have had to impose changes to its day-to-day kitchen operation as well as rectify some legal unknowns regarding its tax-exempt status, she said.

During a telephone press conference that One World called in response to an article in the current issue of the alternative newspaper City Weekly, Cerreta said that she and the two fellow governing board members were taking a firmer hand, particularly in reducing overhead in the wake of recent economic troubles that were driving up food costs as well as the size of its clientele, but driving down revenue.

"We started as a mom-and-pop place," Cerreta said. "But as we've grown more popular, my lack of expertise for running a kitchen and a business was becoming more pronounced. We realized we needed a lot more structure and accountability, and we started moving that direction about a year ago."

Employees were generally resistant to the idea, believing that imposing an establishment business model was a fundamentally wrong approach to running a restaurant that has gained both local success and national attention by letting customers pick the size of their meal portions and trusting them to pay what they believe the food is worth.

According to employees cited in City Weekly, Cerreta's taking control started to violate the basic trust the restaurant is built on. When chef and manager Bo Dean was fired for what the staff believed were unjustified or at least vague reasons, employees grew increasingly upset and walked out Oct. 16.

Governing board member Don Merrill said the issues weren't about trust but about inventory control, employee hours "and a variety of costs that were unexplainable."

The per-plate average that had been steady at \$10 to \$12 the past several months had fallen to around \$7 per meal. At the same time, the payroll had reached what Cerreta called an "outrageous" \$20,000 a month. "We had to find out at the ground level what was going on," Merrill said.

It wasn't the board "just deciding we had bad employees," Cerreta said, noting that she wishes them well, even if, as some have claimed, they will start their own restaurant. "We will help them any way we can. That's what we're about."

The change hasn't been easy but was necessary, she added, noting that it was induced in part by the board's desire to resolve the collective inexperience of how to do it. "The lack of adopting an initial business model is one of our failings."

Someone who has the business model down is Steve Lyman, the restaurateur behind Gastronomy, the Bambara and others. He also regularly entertains One World diners, playing background classical guitar. Lyman has been helping Cerreta free of charge to recast the structure of daily operations, including the hiring of a new chef who starts today.

Merrill said the basic idea of "helping people fill their stomachs and their spirits" will be maintained. "There is an arc to altruistic endeavors like this. At first, it's volunteers, everybody's family and the rules are loose. If you start to get successful — and this one is modeled all over the country — it has to take on a professional appeal. It's been difficult and painful, but people just felt it was moving away from meeting those new expectations."

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