



Everybody Eats

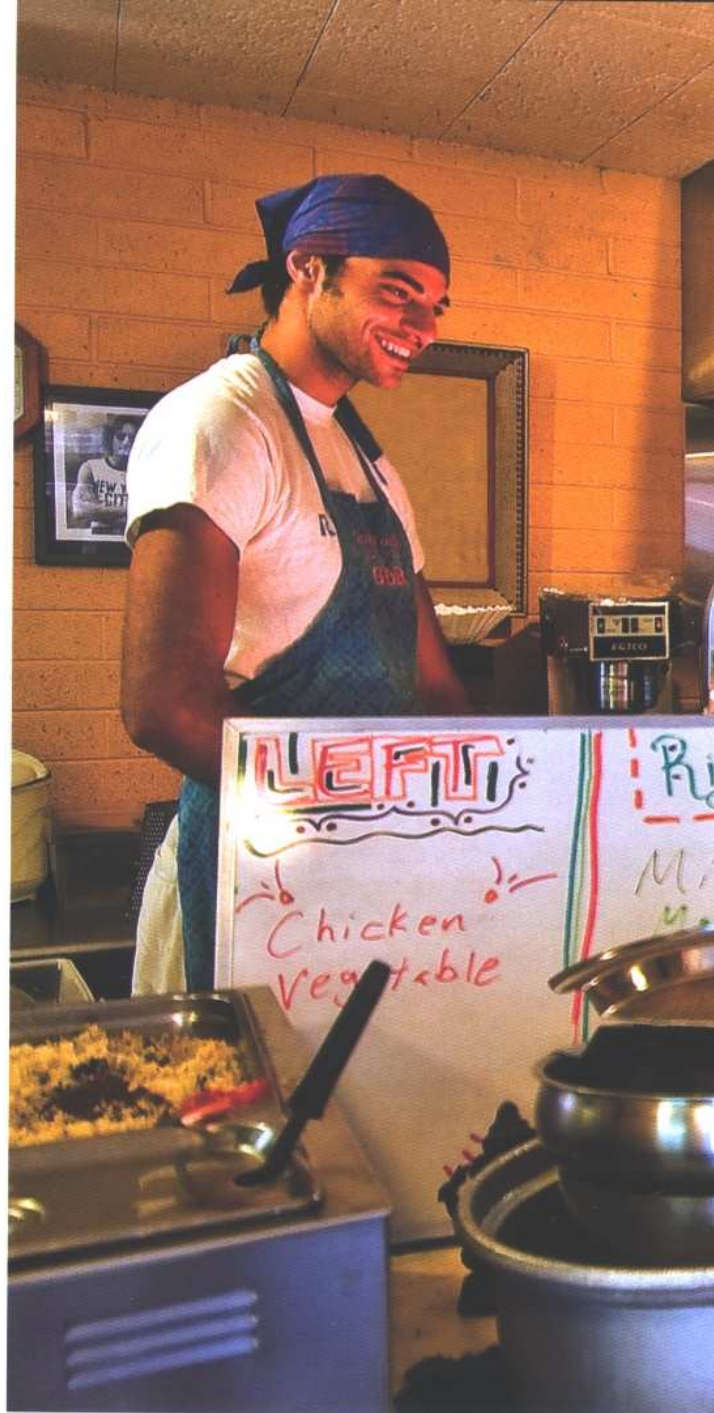
Pay what you please at One World

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN MCCARTHY

DENISE CERRETA WAS WORKING alone, serving food, and taking orders in her quaint, yet simple cafe near downtown Salt Lake City. A customer ordered a turkey sandwich, some salad. Then, when it came time to collect the customer's money, Cerreta received what she calls a "strong nudge from the universe." She said: "Pay what you think it was worth." The phrase just streamed out Cerreta's mouth as if she'd said it a million times before, but the comment surprised Cerreta almost as much as it did her customer. They both burst out laughing. At that moment, Cerreta realized what she was meant to do with her life.

She was struggling financially. She had closed her acupuncture practice of seven years to focus on serving food. She considered ignoring her epiphany. Allowing customers to price their own meals was an idea that easily could end her business, but Cerreta had been feeling spiritually stagnant. She remembered how she had turned her back on a similar nudge years earlier and had promised herself never to let that happen again. "It was almost like the door burst open and this big energy came over me ... and at that moment, it was like my heart expanded. I just felt like this is what I'm supposed to be doing."

What opened as One World Cafe in 2003 morphed into the nonprofit One World Everybody Eats, a community kitchen, in 2006. Cerreta's purpose has remained the same: to serve healthy, organic food to all social classes, while providing a sense of community, and a "hand up, not a hand out." Customers choose their own portions and pay what they feel the meal is worth,



or what they can afford. For those who can't afford to pay, they may volunteer to wash dishes or weed the kitchen's garden for an hour in exchange for a meal voucher. Cerreta's concept has garnered national attention. Just Google "One World Everybody Eats" and you'll find it mentioned, discussed, and analyzed in everything from restaurant reviews to personal blogs.

IF YOU SIT DOWN with Cerreta long enough, regardless of your degree of personal cynicism, you'll begin to understand her belief in the goodness of people. Her brown eyes shine when she discusses the almost unfathomable task of ending world hunger.

Given that her new business model was based on the belief that "people will do the right thing," it's no surprise



that naysayers thought her ideas would fail and prove to be unsustainable. But the community has embraced it—many regular customers have eaten at the cafe since it opened, and more discover it each day. You'll see mothers and kids, business people, hippies, tourists—just about anyone looking for a good meal and a compassionate atmosphere.

Cerreta says she's consistently reminded of the strength of community—loyal customers donated the plot for the garden, and the wood and labor for the front deck. Cerreta has always believed that humanity is inherently good and fair. They only need to be given the opportunity to prove it. "This really works," Cerreta says of the community kitchen, "because we have every socioeconomic group here ... it's relative, your fare may be \$6, their fare may be \$18, and it all averages out

Denise Cerreta (center) has always believed that people are inherently good and fair. That belief is at the heart of why she started One World Everybody Eats. Igor Limansky (left), Daniel Wilson (in red hat), and Dalit Arnon help in the community kitchen.

that everybody can eat." With customers choosing their own portions, there also is little waste at the end of the day.

The food is organic and, typically, seasonal. During Utah's growing season, One World Everybody Eats purchases most of its food from local farmers. Some ingredients also come from the community kitchen's organic garden—a donated plot often tended by volunteers—in which mixed greens, squash, chard, and other vegetables are grown. Basil, oregano, thyme, and lemon sage are just a few of the myriad herbs found in red planter boxes behind the building. A couple of catnip plants are

"I'm looking through some extra rose-colored glasses, but that's my take on the world. People are good. Period. And I'm excited that I get to be a part of it." —Denise Cerreta, owner of One World Everybody Eats

included for her cat, Dorothy. Cerreta lives upstairs with her cat and dog, Gertrude, whom she brought home from India.

ONE WORLD EVERYBODY EATS serves Dal and rice, a traditional Indian meal, as one of the daily dishes. Other staples include soups, quiches, hot entrees, cold sides, and dessert. However, specific ingredients depend upon the food available each day and the imagination of executive chef Dan Cantu and the other employees. Vegetarian, vegan, and meat options always are available.

The dishes often change daily and there's no lack of variety. Salmon with rice, rosemary chicken, black-eyed peas with kale and garlic, and minty fresh green grape extravaganza soup are only a handful of options in a single day. The flavors are fresh and understated. Subtle seasonings allow the ingredients and their flavors to stand out.

A meal at One World Everybody Eats is not complete without the "everything cookie bar," a customer favorite. Its oatmeal base has a soft, creamy texture, and the remaining ingredients depend upon what's available—raisins, chocolate chips, nuts, sometimes cranberries.

While some frequent One World Everybody Eats strictly for the food, most eat here to experience a sense of community. The kitchen is out in the open where diners can see employees prepare their food. Bo Dean, manager of the kitchen, believes that the lack of barrier between cook and diner creates a rapport that does not exist in typical restaurants. With no printed menu, diners discuss each dish with the cook who created it. After they eat, diners can then give feedback directly to the cook. And when employees aren't focused on how much the company is making for each meal, Dean believes they can spend more time connecting with the people they are serving.

The style and feel of the kitchen reflects Cerreta's personality. No hostess waits at the door. No pressed napkins lie on set tables. Instead of a professionally decorated, bustling dining room, the building is divided into individual dining areas that promote intimate conversations. The tables, chairs, and décor change from room to room. Green walls and wooden tables with carved elephants adorn one. Purple walls, photographs of Princess Diana and Mother Theresa, and fabric swatches that


hang from the ceiling and walls decorate another.

The One World Everybody Eats philosophy is spreading, and increasing numbers of people are creating community kitchens of their own. When Brad and Libby Birky of Denver discussed a similar idea with Cerreta, she moved to Denver for a month in 2006 to help the couple start their own kitchen, So All May Eat. Cerreta is doing the same for a couple in Spokane, Washington, who plan to open their own community kitchen in a transitional neighborhood.

Cerreta estimates that she's currently mentoring 10 to 15 other people. These new community kitchens are not affiliated with One World Everybody Eats and Cerreta doesn't fund them financially. However, as new community kitchens open, she hopes to host fundraisers that will offer these kitchens some financial support.

What's next for Cerreta? She plans to purchase a mobile kitchen with money earned from the cafe's first fundraiser to launch what she describes as a community outreach program. With the mobile kitchen, Cerreta will serve food to communities in need, functioning as One World Everybody Eats does. Between the mobile kitchen and community kitchens opening in various states, Cerreta hopes the One World Everybody Eats philosophy eventually will extend beyond the stomachs and wallets of local patrons.

Cerreta jokes that she wishes she could live to the age of 300 so she could accomplish all the projects she has in mind. To coincide with World Food Day in October, she's organized Salt Lake events with Mayor Ralph Becker. She's driven by the idea that she can help remedy world hunger. "Imagine how it would feel to know that for one day, everybody had enough to eat," she says.

In One World Everybody Eats, Cerreta witnesses homeless people eating with dignity, single working mothers feeding their children, and working professionals eating organic, healthy food. "I'm looking through some extra rose-colored glasses, but that's my take on the world. People are good. Period. And I'm excited that I get to be a part of it." 

Angie Fellows, a Utah native, is a proofreader for the Wasatch Journal. She graduates from the University of Utah in December with a degree in mass communication.