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Restaurateur cashes in with donation-style pricing.
(Independent Profile)(*One World Cafe*, Salt Lake City, Utah)
(Interview) *Dina Berta*.

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When Denise Cerreta took over the *One World Cafe* in downtown Salt Lake City, she threw out the menu board. She decided she would cook whatever she wanted. Her next major decision followed naturally. She stopped pricing the food. Customers could pay whatever they wanted.

Cerreta admits her business plan is unseemly, but so far it is working. An acupuncturist for the last seven years, she had added the restaurant to the ground floor of the building where she also had her practice. Initially, she hired others to run the restaurant. Earlier this year she decided it was time for a career change but wasn't sure what she wanted to do. She was interested in homeopathic medicine, but on the way to creating a homeopathic clinic, she became a restaurateur.

Why no menu?

I'm not a robot. I did not want to cook the same thing every day. I want to cook with the seasons, use organic, fresh food. I laid it out in a buffet, the food for the day, like salad, meat loaf, mashed potatoes, cake. I'm on the other side of the table. I hold the plate, and we

create it together. They tell me what they want, how much.



Denise Cerreta

How much do people usually pay? I don't know. It's anonymous. They pay after they eat. The money basket is by the door, in a cubbyhole.

Why don't you charge prices? One afternoon I got a glimpse of a bigger picture. I knew everything would be donation. I thought, oh man, this is crazy,

but in the end I would be doing it, so why not do it now?

At first I thought Six89 and **One World Cafe** had very little in common. Six89 is a darling of local and national critics as well as Zagat survey writers. Chef-owner Mark Fischer offers a one-page menu that changes with the seasons and availability of local produce. And there definitely are prices. The average per-person check, including wine, is about \$60.

Yet the more I thought about the differences between the two, the more similar they seemed. Six89's menu offers a section called Random Acts, where for a set price Fischer cooks a full-course meal of whatever he wants for the customer. Six89 also is in a renovated house and has a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. The people who work there always are smiling.

Both chef-owners are unconventional thinkers. Fischer forsook Aspen, Colo., an upscale skiing resort well known for restaurants of culinary finesse, to open a place in the working-class town of Carbondale, 30 miles north.

So I called Fischer, but I got an answering machine. The restaurant was closed for a month during the off-season. He did reply to my e-mail, however. It seems that Fischer, who has a second restaurant in Carbondale called Phat Thai, was in Thailand doing research. Here are his written responses to some of my questions about Pay What You Think Night:

Why do it?

It seemed to fit our style in the sense that it was a way to generate the sort of feedback that is most meaningful. It's also a way to give thanks to our regulars for their continued support. It's also a pretty good way to empty the walk-in.

Do you do a special menu or just offer the regular, everyday menu?

It's our regular menu. Just no prices.

Did your wait staff think you had lost your mind?

People in general think I'm a little "off," but a great part of our success seems to be our staff. They buy into what we're trying to do, and they believe firmly in our product and how it's presented.

Do customers pay more or less than they do on a regular night?

Check averages are almost identical. The benefits are the same as the aforementioned reasons, besides the fact that it's sort of fun. The energy in the room is a little different.

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But wait. Didn't you have to know what your costs were and how much you needed to make in order to pay for everything?

When I started, I estimated my daily expenses. I needed \$166 a day to pay for the rent, keep utilities on and so fourth. Then I priced the meals, between \$5 and \$8. I also made sandwiches. But then I saw the bigger picture. Everyone can eat. Everyone can eat with dignity. I have people in the cafe who like it because it's a nice place to eat organic, gourmet food.

I'm making a lot more money since I went to donations than I was when I priced everything. I do not know how even it is.

It sounds like customers are not taking advantage of the no-prices.

Give people a little bit of trust and a chance to have dignity, and they will step up to that. People who I know are panhandlers a block away at the 7-Eleven come in and pay me for a cup of coffee. It's amazing.

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