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Nonprofit eatery can't bring home bacon

One World Cafe, where patrons set prices, has had trouble paying employees

By **Kathy Stephenson**
The Salt Lake Tribune

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For nearly a year, Salt Lake City's One World Cafe - founded on the altruistic goal of letting customers set their own meal price - has been on a crash course with business reality.

In mid-October, employee paychecks bounced and the longtime manager was fired. Bo Dean's dismissal angered the rest of the staff enough that they walked out in protest.

Founder Denise Cerreta was forced to call a temporary staffing agency so she could serve customers.

Inexperience seems to be the main problem for the nonprofit cafe at 41 S. 300 East.

"As the restaurant grew, I didn't have the expertise at running a kitchen," acknowledged Cerreta during a media teleconference call on Friday. "We needed more structure and a more professional kitchen."

A recent review of the business showed the restaurant was overstaffed and management of employee time was poor. It never even had an employee time clock. The restaurant also had failed to keep concise records of food costs and fixed costs. All told, mismanagement cost the restaurant \$8,000 to \$10,000 a month, Cerreta said.



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The One World Cafe, in the last month, fired its... (Scott Sommerdorf / The Salt Lake Tribune)

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"There just wasn't a system in place so that it would work as a professional establishment," added Steve Lyman, a longtime restaurant manager from Squatters, Red Rock and Bambara, who is volunteering his time to help get One World in order.

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During the past week, the restaurant has implemented new kitchen procedures and hired a new executive chef and sous chef.

"We were financially shaky, but we will be fine," Cerrera said. "We are in no danger of us closing."

Following tradition wasn't what Cerrera wanted when she founded The One World "Everybody Eats" Cafe five years ago.

She envisioned a restaurant with no menus or set prices. Cerrera, and later her chefs, would make entrees, soups, salads and desserts from organic meats and locally grown produce. Diners filled their plates with only the food they wanted and paid what they thought the meal was worth or what they could afford.

The idea was unique and quickly gained national attention. Cerrera turned the business into the

nonprofit One World Everybody Eats Foundation with its own board of directors. She traveled the country speaking about the concept and helped people start similar community kitchens in other cities.

But this summer, while Cerrera was in Seattle, One World's revenues began declining. Meal donations, which once averaged \$10, had fallen to \$7.

At one point, the bank account was so depleted that employee paychecks bounced.

"Mine didn't clear for 3 1/2 months," said Dean, who had worked at the restaurant since its inception. He had been asked to create a more professional operation in recent months, but when the board decided he wasn't up to the task, they fired him.

Dean believes Cerrera's constant absence from the restaurant and lack of communication exacerbated the financial problems.

To expand the "One World" concept, Cerrera was out of town much of the time, he said. She also has pulled trained chefs away from day-to-day restaurant operations to help with the expansion.

"It's hard to implement changes when I was the only one around," said Dean, who heard that he had been fired from a fellow employee - not Cerrera or the board.

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