

Host

"If I had my way," says Cerreta (at her cafe), "there would be a One World Café in every city."

# The Price Is Right

Denise Cerreta's One World Café offers the next best thing to a free lunch

**T**hink Denise Cerreta's spaghetti and Swedish meatballs are to die for? Pay her what you think it deserves. Short a few bucks? Well, her front lawn could use mowing. At One World Café in Salt Lake City, down-home cooking comes without sticker shock. Instead, customers pay—or barter—what they think the meal is worth. "It doesn't matter how much money you make," explains Cerreta, 42. "Everybody can eat—and pay whatever they can afford."

To the diverse array of customers—professionals, students, retirees and the homeless—who have become regulars at Cerreta's buffet-style eatery, it's an idea whose time has come. Armed with a

passion for good food and a desire to build community in the big city, the former acupuncturist came up with the idea for her quirky cafe last spring after trying and failing to run a sandwich shop the old-fashioned way. "I was working night and day and barely making rent," she says. Sick of red ink, she tossed out her price board and cash register. "When the next customer came through the door, I said, 'Just pay what you feel like paying.' He gave me this look like 'Huh?'"

Now the business is taking off: Cerreta has hired nine workers for her eatery and is breaking even. Patrons pay using the honor system, stuffing everything from spare change to 20s

into a basket or by performing odd jobs like harvesting food from the cafe vegetable garden. One regular even pays the water bill in exchange for free meals, while others have donated organic produce from their gardens. Free-loaders aren't a problem. "If people don't pay this time, I know they'll pay next time," says Cerreta. "This place is about trust."

Along with enjoying Cerreta's chicken stir fry and chocolate chip cookies, customers like the easy-on-the-wallet vibe. "This place makes you feel better about spending money to eat out," says Alison Barr, 19, who works at a local health spa. "And besides, the food is excellent." ●