

Free Archive

HOME

U.S.

WORLD

BLOGS

BUSINESS & TECH

HEALTH & SCIENCE

ENTERTAINMENT

PHOT

Welcome To The New TIME.com

Where "Check Please" Is Your Call

By PETA OWENS-LISTON

Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2006



Restaurateur Denise Cerreta at her cafe in Salt Lake City, UT, One World Cafe, where customers are invited to barter and pay what they think the meal is worth.

ERIC OSTLING

TOP STORIES

Obama Shakes Up the
Get Ready for an Oran
A Taliban Spokesman

Deciding between the spicy peanut stew and the pesto chicken, or the squash soup and the avocado, chicken, lime soup, are not the only decisions tempting patrons at the One World Caf^e in Salt Lake City and the SAME (So All Might Eat) Caf^e in Denver. They must also decide what the meal is worth.

These pay-as-you-can cafes have missions that are unapologetically altruistic — call it serving up fare Robin Hood style. "Our philosophy is that everyone, regardless of economic status, deserves the chance to eat healthy, organic food while being treated with dignity," explains

ARTICLE TOOLS

Print

Email

Brad Birky, who opened SAME with his wife, Libby, in October. Customers who have no money are encouraged to exchange an hour of service — sweep, wash the dishes, weed the organic garden — for a meal. Likewise, guests who have money are encouraged to leave a little extra to offset the meals of those who have less to give. "We're a hand up, not a handout," says One World owner Denise Cerreta, who prides herself on the fact that everyone can afford a meal at her café.

An epiphany scribbled out on a cocktail napkin on a plane ride gave birth to SAME café (www.soallmayeat.org). Both Brad and Libby had been searching for a meaningful way to give back while making a living. Admitted volunteer junkies, they had been serving and eating with homeless shelter residents for the past eight years. "We loved the service aspect of giving to the community and attacking the issue of hunger," says Brad. "Plus we both love to cook." When they found out about One World, they flew to Salt Lake City to learn how it was run. Cerreta, in turn, spent a month helping the Birkys prepare for opening. One World has had more than 25 inquiries from others around the country interested in starting a similar café. Recently, the café formed a nonprofit www.oneworldeverybodyeats.com aimed at helping others replicate such a venture.

The café's clientele is as diverse as the from-scratch buffet-style dishes. Attorneys and CEOs, students, seniors and soccer moms, as well as those down on their luck are among the 150-200 customers that dine daily at One World. Sniffling from a cold, Mike Dega, an environmental engineer, came in looking for comfort food. "I feel like I'm getting a whole new set of nutrients here as opposed to processed food — plus all the spices and flavors here are a real turn-on."

The café's business models have won fans among the city's well-to-do residents, many of whom regularly dine there. At One World, patrons have given Cerreta a car, bought new dishes, arranged to professionally clean her carpets, supplied new tile for the restaurant bathrooms, and donated property for an organic garden and funded a new irrigation system for it. Last week, a gentleman left a \$50 bill next to an empty bowl of soup at SAME. Since opening, one man has regularly come in and left money on the counter without eating, stating "I was blessed today so I thought I'd pass it on." He's homeless.

Because customers decide on their portion sizes and the fact that most of the food is fresh (as opposed to stocked), very little food is wasted. At the end of the day at One World, only one garbage can needs to be emptied. "I can come in here and eat a ton after a (construction) shift for lunch and pay what I can, and then my mom, who eats a lot less, can just get the amount she wants and pay what she feels is fair," says regular Justin Wood, 25, who is sipping coffee

