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People

Denise Cerreta

by Heather L King

It seems that Denise Cerreta was born to help people. After graduating from college in her home state of Ohio, the founder of One World Café in Salt Lake City and the One World Everybody Eats foundation, began a career in the healing arts. She first went to massage school and then, wanting to help patients more, spent four years in graduate school to become a doctor of Oriental medicine.

However, when she felt she was losing her passion for her chosen profession, Cerreta heeded an inner voice telling her to do something dramatic and closed her acupuncture business of seven years and began feeding people. "I found my purpose," she recalls. But with no restaurant experience and no staff, she struggled to keep her sandwich and coffee shop open. "My car was repossessed. I walked to Wild Oats. I couldn't afford wholesale produce. I was working 18-hour days. It built character, but it's a miracle I survived."

Despite this rough beginning, by mid-2003, Cerreta pulled together the concepts that have made One World Café such a success. A first-of-its-kind community kitchen designed to provide anyone with a healthy meal, there is no set menu, and diners are asked to pay (on the honor system) what they feel the meal was worth. For those who find they cannot afford a meal, Cerreta is happy to trade for dishwashing, help in the garden or other services. On a daily basis, patrons of this downtown Salt Lake City gathering place range from lawyers to students to homeless people, each drawn by the promise that their particular needs will be satisfied before they leave.

The non-profit foundation One World Everybody Eats is an extension of Cerreta's belief that food can be the center around which communities are developed and strengthened. The One World mission is "to eliminate waste in the food industry, serve all organic food that is free of pesticides and antibiotics, support local organic farmers, pay employees a living wage and offer a hand up volunteer-training program, rather than a hand out."

So far, faith and perseverance have played a tremendous role in the success of One World Everybody Eats. "I've been able to make this work with all my ideals intact," she explains. "I believe it is going to work, so I keep working."

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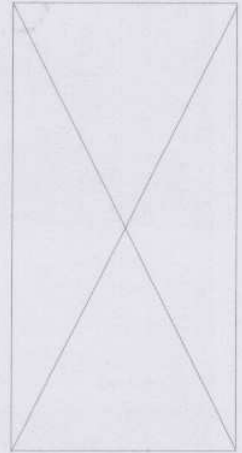
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Having just celebrated the One World Café's third anniversary (now with 12 employees earning \$10 to \$14 per hour) and receiving worldwide recognition for her efforts along the way, Cerreta is ready to take One World vision nationwide. In June, Cerreta spoke at the second annual Women's Conference sponsored by the International Association for Human Values and Art of Living Foundation in Bangalore, India. While in India, she sponsored a woman who will begin making handmade items as a cottage industry.

Cerreta believes that her business model will work anywhere if a sense of community can be developed, and her recently completed how-to manual, *Spirit of Business: Guide to Setting Up a Community Kitchen* will encourage and prepare others to realize their goals of helping people live better. "The manual is a grounded, realistic approach," she says, as well as a testimony for how businesses can become more spiritually based and sustainable by redefining the bottom line without sacrificing it.

Heather L. King is the marketing communications manager for a Salt Lake City-based engineering firm and a regular Utah Business contributor.



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