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## Pick your portion and price at revolutionary One World Cafe

By Nancy Hobbs  
Special to The Tribune

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SALT LAKE CITY – Several large, empty burlap coffee-bean bags hanging across the street mark the location of Denise Cerreta's One World Cafe – a name more than one diner has mistakenly, but perhaps intuitively, called "another world" cafe.

Inside, Cerreta's enterprise – again, what others may call her "experiment" – is something totally foreign to our capitalistic sensibilities, as well as our restaurant expectations.

One World Cafe appears tiny, with the "open kitchen" and buffet line taking up much of the space, and just a few small tables on the periphery. The block walls are brightly painted and adorned with framed art and knickknacks that give it a fitting "alternative" feel.

But past the lunch line and down the hall are several more rooms furnished for diners' comfort, including one with a low table for floor seating; another with a couch and small lamp tables that seems best suited for sipping coffee or tea with dessert, rather than managing a plate on your lap; and one that has more of a "lunchroom" feel, with a traditional table that can accommodate a group.

Instead of a menu, or even a blackboard with the day's specials, diners learn what's cooking by starting at the head of the line, where two large warmers generally are filled with soup, at least one of them vegetarian. The soup is self-serve, and the bowls – apparently acquired from area thrift stores and garage sales, as are the plates – are varying sizes to suit your appetite.

Next are the day's salads, which usually include a diced fruit option, one with mixed greens and a couple of other selections.

Quiche seems to be a staple, though the fillings change, and there generally are a couple of dessert choices. At the end of the line are main dishes and vegetables, and a cooler stocked with juice, milk and other drinks.

Other than the soup, cafe staff dish up what diners want, and in the portion requested; they're sticklers about making sure you give them direction in these areas, for a couple of reasons.

First – and this is a hard concept for many of us to grasp – at the end of the meal, diners decide how much to pay and deposit that amount in a small basket as they leave. Since diners aren't paying a set amount, they don't have to worry about the owners skimping on portions, nor do they feel pressured to overeat in order to get their money's worth. Of course, second helpings are allowed.

Choosing your own portion also cuts down on waste. Diners bus their own dishes, and are asked to scrape waste into the adjacent garbage can. It's notable, however, that few people do scrape, having selected only what and how much they want to eat.

As a reviewer, I basically went through the line requesting a "taste" of everything on each occasion I visited, with larger portions of a few items. Depending on when you arrive, it seems, you have more or less to choose from.

At the height of the lunch hour recently, we found plenty of options, with most choices suitable for vegetarians and vegans. At least half a dozen salads were offered, including a bean and corn mix, couscous, tabbouleh, spinach salad and a crunchy coleslaw with raw cashews.

The day's main dish was chicken curry over rice. The stew was tasty, with mild curry sauce and chunks of tender potatoes along with the chicken. On the side were roasted sweet potatoes and collard greens.

Everything was good, although some of the items (the rice and bean quiche, in particular) were a bit bland and needed

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salt and pepper. The seasonings, however, are inconveniently located at a central station, along with other condiments, in the midst of the serving line. A different or additional location for these items would be nice; perhaps salt and pepper shakers could even be on the tables.

One World Cafe is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., though Cerreta said early birds generally find coffee and cereal, and maybe some fruit, to start the day. As the hours progress, additional dishes are created so there is a pretty full line out by lunchtime.

My second visit was a little earlier than the traditional lunch hour, and the options weren't nearly as plentiful as on the first visit, though I still found enough to eat. I especially enjoyed the day's fresh-baked apple pie, which was among the best I've tasted. I was sorry I hadn't requested a larger piece initially, and barely resisted the temptation to ask for seconds.

Next month will mark One World Cafe's first anniversary, and despite skeptics' initial reactions to the concept, it seems to be thriving.

Cerreta has expanded her hours of operation since last fall, and has increased her work force. She started out with one assistant and now has six paid employees.

People seem to be embracing the entrepreneur's novel idea of paying a "fair price," perhaps even adding a little more so Cerreta can achieve her goal of making sure that everyone, regardless of his or her ability to pay, can still eat.

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Nancy Hobbs is The Tribune's restaurant reviewer. The newspaper covers the cost of meals at restaurants reviewed and there is no connection between reviews and restaurant advertising. Hobbs welcomes food and wine news, comments and suggestions at [nhobbs@xmission.com](mailto:nhobbs@xmission.com)

**One World Cafe**

- Where: 41 S. 300 East; no phone
- Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily
- Prices: Fair value: diners pay what they feel is appropriate
- Liquor: No
- Reservations: No
- Child's menu: No
- Takeout: Yes
- Wheelchair accessible: No
- Parking: Street/meter parking
- Credit cards: No; cash only

One World Cafe, 41 S. 300 East; no phone. Hours: daily, 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Prices: Fair value: diners pay what they feel is appropriate; Liquor: No. Denise Cerreta and crew fix something different everyday, including vegetarian and vegan offerings, then serve up only what you want, and in the portions you request. As you leave, pay what you feel your meal was worth – or a little more to help make sure everyone can eat.