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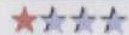
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In a World of Its Own

By Kathy Stephenson
The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake City's One World Cafe breaks two of the most fundamental rules of the restaurant business.

First, there are no menus. Diners at the restaurant, 41 S. 300 East, eat whatever sparks the culinary imagination of owner and chef Denise Cerreta.

Most days she offers soup, one or two salads, quiche, a main entree and a dessert, all of which were inspired by the fresh, organic produce and meats she buys that day.

Customers can fill their plates with as much, or as little, as they want and — here is the second business breach — pay what they feel their meal is worth. In place of a cash register, Cerreta has a brown basket where patrons place their money.

Low on cash? Then a small scoop of the black bean salad and a slice of bread will do.

Or maybe it's payday and your wallet can accommodate a bit more, like the cool gazpacho, an enchilada and some of that decadent chocolate cake with strawberries.

"I'm a for-profit business, but I operate in a sort of nonprofit mode," says the 41-year-old Cerreta, who opened the cafe in April with the mission of serving not just quality, unprocessed foods, but her community as well.

She encourages her customers, many of whom are vegetarians and vegans, to share plates. And she doesn't mind if you want just a "sliver" of her double espresso brownie. With diners deciding how much food to eat, Cerreta says there is little waste and no need for her customers to overeat just to get their money's worth.

Cerreta admits it's a strange business model in today's capitalistic society and has never heard of anyone else, at least in Utah, who does anything similar.



Calvin Tucker and Andrea Chivers dine in the casual atmosphere of downtown Salt Lake City's One World Cafe. (Rick Egan/The Salt Lake Tribune)

Featured Section

Laura Seitz, Deseret Morning News

"That's the beauty of it. And everybody is fair. It doesn't

matter if they're making \$4,000, \$40,000 or \$400,000, that's the point. They put a fair price" on what they eat, she says.

And because customers choose their own portions of everything on the plate, there's very little waste.

"They go away satisfied without feeling guilty."

Loyal customers are her best advertising, often come accompanied by a friend who "heard so much about this place I had to see it for myself." As a result, she's made enough money not only to keep it open but to hire four full-time employees. Dishwashers are often students, who trade labor for their meals, or homeless people who help her keep up the yard outside the building and take out the trash.

She plans to plant a garden to grow her own fresh produce next spring and knows she won't have to spend much time there because there will always be those looking to trade work for food. Cerreta is always happy to oblige.

Her favorite part of the job is actually serving the food, she said, because it gives her a chance not just to cook with care but to labor with love for those who come inside. She hopes to help change people's relationships with food, she said, by infusing her own health consciousness not only into the mixture of ingredients but into the portion sizes and the demeanor with which she serves it up.

On the day this writer was there, the menu consisted of vegetarian minestrone and potato soups, quiche, spinach and carrot salads, chicken pot pie, chicken salad, various breads, pumpkin pie, cookies, organic fruit, coffee and other drinks.

Her "no waste" policy offers a clue into the essence of what customers feel inside the cafe. "Whatever is left over at the end of the day is packaged up and set outside for people in need" with no expectation of anything other than goodwill in return.

She smiles. "It's always gone in the morning."

But it's more than the portions-to-fit and the pay-as-you-decide policy that Cerreta believes keeps her clientele growing.

There's a "one-world" feel about the place that's difficult to describe, she admits, but most everyone who comes inside comments on it.

It may have something to do with how her idea of what is "enough" has changed in the past few months. "I live in a one-bedroom apartment with heat and lights and running water, and that's more than enough for me." As for her business model, "I wouldn't go back (to menus and a cash register) for anything. I want to see this grow. My goal is to help solve world hunger."

She hopes to open a second cafe on Salt Lake City's west side "near the homeless shelter" in the near future.

Though she doesn't claim membership in any one faith tradition, Cerreta believes "we can all be more Christ-like, rather than just looking to Christ to do something for the masses. Our communion with the divine is how we can personally be more like Christ or Buddha. It's that we're all divine and we can live that out."

And Denise Cerreta looks to be doing just that, one plate at a time.