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**COMMUNITY****Excelsior is breath of French air**

□ Not merely an espresso nook, cafe caters to varied clientele

By Tim Neff
Emerald Associate Editor

The European-style cottage that houses the Excelsior Cafe seems out of place on the same block as 7-Eleven and Dairy Queen.

A breath of French air on East 13th Avenue.

But during the past 20 years, the Excelsior has carved a niche for itself by offering something for everyone.

Wine connoisseurs come for the premium Oregon wines. Students drop by on the way to class for muffins and espresso. And the bar is a popular attraction on the weekends.

It's all according to plan for owners Phil and Stephanie Kimmel.

"When we opened, we wanted to be a cafe in the French tradition," Stephanie Kimmel said. "We are open late and offer a lot of different options."

The Excelsior was an instant hit when Kimmel opened the cafe April 10, 1972 with her first husband, Del Pearl. At the time, espresso machines and Italian sodas were few and far between.

"Back then there were really just steak houses and continental restaurants," she said. "We filled a niche right away."

Prior to the Excelsior, espresso in Oregon was the exclusive domain of New World Coffee, where Kimmel worked while a University graduate student. When New World Coffee closed in 1971, she began looking for a place to open a small cafe of her own.

The search brought her to the old house on East 13th Avenue.

After its construction in 1910, the building housed a



Photo by Sol Neeliman

Stephanie Kimmel and husband, Phil, run the Excelsior Cafe, which caters to everyone from wine connoisseurs to students passing by for a muffin.

'We have this reputation as an expensive and fancy restaurant, which we're not.'

— Stephanie Kimmel,
Excelsior co-owner

long succession of organizations and businesses. It was the Kappa Kappa Gamma house until the early 1930s, when Delta Upsilon moved in. Other residents included a Christian co-op, a clothing store and KZEL radio.

The Excelsior originally occupied only the front room and the patio. KZEL and the clothing store continued to use the other first-floor rooms until 1974.

"In the beginning it was very fortuitous that we had such a small space," Kimmel said. "It

allowed us to grow organically. As the demand grew, we were able to create new areas."

In the early 1970s, the University campus had a reputation for violent protest and conflict, which isolated it from the larger Eugene community, Kimmel said. As a result, the cafe served University students almost exclusively.

But in recent years, students have come to perceive the Excelsior as an elite, upscale restaurant.

"Maybe we haven't done a good enough job of communicating what we have to offer," Kimmel said. "We have this reputation as an expensive and fancy restaurant, which we're not."

A sidewalk dining area, which will open in May, is aimed at overcoming that reputation, she said.

"The sidewalk cafe will be a bridge out to the students and other pedestrians passing by," she said.

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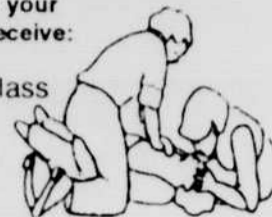
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