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Chrystal McConnell Emerald

John Burzell and Kate Clawson exchange a momentary glance as they pass each other in the hallway leading to the wine cellar.

Waiting for love and money

■ Restaurant workers say Valentine's Day shifts can be both fun and stressful

By Steve Ewing
For the Emerald

At 7 p.m. on Valentine's Day, John Burzell will be working. That suits his girlfriend, Kate Clawson, just fine, because they'll be together.

Burzell and Clawson are servers at the Italian restaurant Beppe & Gianni's. Burzell's ex-girlfriend will also be working that night, but there will hardly be time for romantic interludes or awkward moments for any of them. Valentine's Day is the busiest day of the year at Beppe and Gianni's.

During the slow winter months, restaurants welcome the large influx of business on Valentine's Day. What it means for servers, however, is a near guarantee that they will be working on the special night.

For servers who are not as lucky as Burzell and Clawson, Valentine's Day can stir up a variety of feelings. Servers who are single on Valentine's Day may get depressed because they are surrounded by couples in love.

Added to this is the performance pressure for a server on Valentine's Day. Confusing an order or spilling a glass of wine on a customer is all the more tragic on this day, simply because expectations are so high.

Michelle Royce, a server at Cafe Soriah, said she looks forward to working on Valentine's Day. The fact that she is happily dating someone plays a part in her optimism, but she said she enjoys the holiday shift for other reasons as well.

"People tip better on Valentine's Day," she said, "and it's fun to guess the relationship between the two people sitting across from each other."

Because about 40 percent of

Cafe Soriah's customers are regulars, Royce has the added pleasure of watching relationships grow. Knowing the customers also helps relieve the pressure of Valentine's Day. A regular customer is more likely to forgive a mistake than is a new diner.

Servers at Beppe & Gianni's offer varying accounts of their moods on past Valentine's Days. After some reflection, Burzell said, "I can't remember the last time I was single on Valentine's Day."

Clawson, however, said she remembers past years differently than her boyfriend. "In years past, when I've worked on Valentine's Day, it is the worst day to wait tables if you don't have a significant other at the time. ... It's really depressing."

This year promises to be better for Clawson. Although she and Burzell won't have much time for romance, he plans to pull her close at some point in the evening and whisper in her ear, "Table five needs bread."



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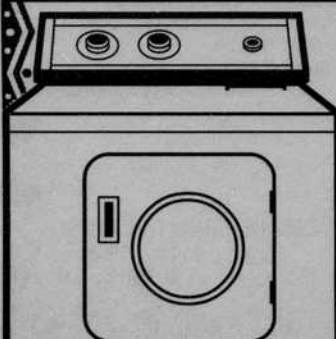
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