

Oshiana and Sheri Thieben, Ms. Fay Carter, Park St. Café



Living the Vision

Three local places dream big.

STORY BY LANCE SPARKS • PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

Open a restaurant: This is a dream I've had. There have been assorted Sparkses in restaurants for at least four generations. The restaurant dream lurks in the bloodline. One of my earliest, fondest memories is being dandled on Grandpa's knee, wagging chubby fingers in the cash register till of his diner somewhere near Charleston, S.C. Years later, manifest heritage: busboy, waiter, headwaiter, sommelier, manager, eventually part owner, working 14-hour days, seven days a week until Kat stamped her foot, said, "No more, all done." Wake up from reverie.

Even if some folks aren't deep-wired for The Biz, the dream is easy to catch. Begins with love of food, weakness for hospitality, yen for the sweet experience of eating well in a pretty place. The dream can even warp a business plan, goes like this: People always gotta eat, right? You serve 'em tasty food in a nice joint, at decent prices, they'll form a line out the door, right?

Right: Failure rate hovers around 50 percent. Happily, start-ups run at a slightly higher rate, and new dreamers wake inspired every day. We present three, a triple scoop of fine food dreams.

Park Street Café

Ambiance: cozy, tidy, warm and welcoming, high ceilings, old-brick walls, blond-wood tables (two outside), comfortable chairs, plants and fresh flowers, windows on to the street, tree-green streaming sunlight, the bustle of shoppers on Market days.

The new owners: two young women with deep restaurant pasts giving themselves a new present. Sheri Thieben and Fay Carter worked their ways through various venues, found themselves cooking together and liking it. Guy named Moe had owned Park Street Café for 12 years, sold out to Ruth, an employee, but she split town. Thieben and Carter signed in, remodeled, re-opened. "We have a beautiful vision," says Thieben. "We're living our vision," Carter adds.

Righteous food: Breakfasts and lunches with flavor from the "highest quality, local, sustainable ingredients" at honest prices: eggs and toast at \$4.95; oatmeal with cinnamon, sunflower seeds, dates, raisins, choice of soy-, rice-, or cow's-milk or yogurt at \$3.95; salmon burger \$7.50; tempeh Reuben, \$6.75; arrays of salads; basic black beans and rice \$3.75.

Huevos rancheros delish at \$6.50; helps to shop for fresh seasonal fruit and veggies 50 feet from the door.

Sweet little joint, tucked away. Hope they make it. Should have beer and wine by July. Right now: "We're getting by," Theiben says. Quirky hours, just for fun: 7:44 am-2:46 pm Monday-Friday, 9:29 am-3:29 pm Saturday, closed Sunday.

776 W. Park, in the historic Smeed Building. 485-2089.

Jo Federigo's

Rick Kluser and Searose Hood bought the venerable Jo Fed's in February of this year, spiffed the place up and developed an ambitious Italian menu, a mix of the traditional (pizzas and calzone; pastas such as spaghetti, ravioli, lasagna, cannelloni, fettuccine four ways; entrées from chicken piccata at \$16 to spiced sesame ahi at \$19 to tenderloin at \$26), with prices more than fair in the current market. The wine list is modest in length (16 white, 22 reds), strong in Italians and Northwest wines, good prices; nine micros on tap, including Stella Artois, all \$4/pint.

Hood and Kluser retained the best of the old Jo: Full bar and generous drinks; the most experienced servers, including Blake Livingston, a consummate pro; and, of course, the music. Jo's has for decades been Eugene's top venue for the area's top jazz musicians, some of whom developed a dedicated fan base; pianist Barbara Dzuro, for example, could always fill the place with her following.

The space really is — always has been — attractive and lively, the front room with tables dressed in white clothes, a wall of south-facing windows looking across to Fifth Street Market, the light creamy in summer sunsets, some OK art on the walls. The back dining room still wears its distinctive umbrellas on the ceiling. The downstairs bar is cleaner now but still huddles jazz lovers close to the music (starts at 9 pm).

The food is good, even if Hood and Kluser are struggling with start-up blues, trying to retain a talented kitchen staff and give an established house a new identity. So easy to see this image: Good Italian food, fine American music. Who could resist?

259 E. 5th Ave. 343-8488.

Our Daily Bread

Tim and Catherine Perkins bought Our Daily Bread in February of this year, and they might be positioned to become a special success story. Just a short shot down Territorial from some of this region's best wineries — ten minutes south to Hinman/Silvan Ridge, Sweet Cheeks, Iris Hill, King Estate, Chateau Lorane; five minutes to Secret House, less to LaVelle — this could become Lane wine country's first full-service, fine-dining house, just at the right time. Last year, King Estate drew ten thousand visitors, with more expected this year. ODB might become a precursor, the sort of fine restaurant in small-town atmosphere we could find today in Napa Valley villages like Calistoga and St. Helena.

The building began its life as a Pentecostal church, was moved to Veneta, bought, remodeled (adding a steeple, lovely wood floors, gothic-arch windows with stained glass, a banquet room) and operated by Rick Di Angelo for ten years as a bakery and lunch spot. The Perkins family (daughter Tabitha also involved) remodeled and cleaned, dressed up the outside dining area, livened up grounds and garden. ODB now offers a super dinner menu (also serving breakfast and lunch six days, closed Mondays) at grand-theft prices: seven appetizers, including Alsea crab cakes, \$7.95; wide range of entrées, seafood (e.g., tempura prawns, \$12.95, smoked salmon pappardelle, \$14.95), beef (Featherbenders prime rib, \$16.95, or \$19.95 with prawns), poultry (Featherbenders smoked duck, \$24.95), four vegetarian dishes, soups, salads, desserts.

Wine list is brief but entirely dedicated to area vintners, including some rare finds, all priced for retail or in-house (about \$3 more, for glassware and service, reasonable). Plans call for a retail wine space soon; free wine tastings, featuring the local bests, take place on Saturdays noon-5 pm).

Our Daily Bread feels comfortable, the place is intriguing, and the food is good. With proper support, this could become a destination. Given its unique structure, this might be a dream with a prayer.

88170 Territorial Road, Veneta. 935-4921.

Rick Kluser, Jo Federigo's



Tabitha (seated), Catherine and Tim Perkins, Our Daily Bread