

### Evangelism Vegetarian Style

by Suzanne Schüppel-Frey

**A**dventist-run vegetarian restaurants are mushrooming across the country. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but at least 25 restaurants are presently operating and plans to open more are in progress. Franchises are now part of the picture, too.

Profit, however, is not the only motivating force behind these enterprises. Adventist restaurant owners and managers also see their health knowledge as a tool to present Christ. However, the means of witnessing vary from those who view the mere fact that the restaurant is vegetarian, reasonably priced, and providing a general Christian atmosphere as a witness to those non-profit organizations which try to follow Ellen G. White councils by serving no dairy products and conducting an extensive evangelistic outreach.

When Sandra Bradford opened the Soupstone in Loma Linda, Calif., four years ago, she had no previous restaurant business experience. Today, she controls a franchise of two successful restaurants with three more to open soon.

Contrary to some Adventist food places, the Soupstone is run strictly as a business. There are no tracts on the tables and no literature racks on the wall. No cooking classes or Bible studies are offered.

Referring to her 20, mostly part-time employees, she adds, "If I have done any type of so called Christian work at all, I have

certainly helped a lot of students get through school. I have good rapport with teenagers—we are like a family here."

Tracts or not, the Soupstone provides a quiet, peaceful atmosphere. Nobody smokes or drinks, no television or loud music plays. Many customers quietly pray before their meal. Live, classical, or Christian music is occasionally performed by music students. Neatly dressed young men and women politely wait on the tables.

The restaurant's interior design is an elegant, yet cozy, 1920's farmhouse style, with carved oak furniture, burgundy drapes and carpet, green plants, and old-fashioned pictures and lamps. Bradford's own favorite recipes for soups, salads, and crepes attract a large clientele. Along with dinner, one can enjoy a "mocktail:" a non-alcoholic version of wine, Mai Tais, strawberry daiquiris, or other drinks. Cheesecake or fruit pies with ice cream are popular desserts.

The Soupstone is being franchised in Kansas simply because two former Loma Linda residents and faithful Soupstone eaters wanted to have their favorite restaurant closer to their new home. They opened another Soupstone in a large shopping mall in Shawnee Mission. Since the restaurant followed its predecessor's pattern of instant success, more Kansas Soupstones are expected to mushroom. In California, another Soupstone will soon open in Riverside, and Bradford is busy planning for new locations in Palm Springs and San Bernardino.

Bradford, mother of four and married to a travelling Adventist evangelist, says she gets frustrated when people expect her to use her restaurants as centers for outreach.

"It seems that when you put a minister's wife together with a vegetarian restaurant,

it is assumed it should be a non-profit business used for witnessing," she says. "Paying for my children's education in denominational schools is expensive. I will become a non-profit organization when the church decides to offer free education."

**I**n New York City, evangelism is the whole purpose for the non-profit Country Life restaurant, the center of a loosely knit organization of Adventist self-supporting, non-profit restaurants and healthfood stores across country. Although each of the approximately 20 food places in the organization (Southern Missionary Society) is financially and legally separate, the board members overlap.

These restaurants and stores endeavor to follow Ellen White's councils, they include no dairy products or sugar in their menu, offer cooking classes, Bible studies, and generally operate as training centers for city evangelism.

Country Life opened three years ago in Manhattan's financial district, only a block from Wall Street. Soups, fruit and vegetable salads, entrees and cereal breakfasts are attracting between 500 to 600 customers daily (except Saturdays). The \$3.97 charge is for "all you can eat" and a money back guarantee if the customer is not satisfied. A \$25 meal ticket will buy customers all they can eat for breakfast and lunch during the work week.

At this restaurant, a tract about mental and physical health is sure to be on each table, and notices inviting customers to stress seminars, cooking classes, weekly Bible studies, and Daniel and Revelation seminars are posted on the walls.

Says manager Steve Grabiner, "The aim is to reach as many people as possible. The health message is the opening wedge for the gospel to enter people's lives. . . . Our health is intimately tied in with our relationship with God." He says close to 20 people have been baptized as a result of eating at Country Life.

All of the 30 restaurant employees live

together in an eight-room mansion on a 260-acre farm outside the city. Free room and board and a monthly stipend of \$70 is the compensation for everybody, managers as well as kitchen personnel.

Yet another type of vegetarian restaurant is in Troy, a suburb of Detroit, Mich. It is owned by Don and Phyllis Yohe. Pure N'Simple is run as a profit-making business, yet its main purpose is evangelism.

The restaurant is in a remodeled bank building and seats 80 people. It is decorated in a light, airy, contemporary style with pinewood furniture and green plants. Literature racks offer information on physical and spiritual health. Director Eric Kratoch and his wife also hold regular cooking classes and Bible studies in a nearby Adventist church. Kratoch believes that the educational follow-up is the most important aspect of their ministry. "When people realize they need to change their lifestyles, you can not just leave them hanging," he says. "Last time we offered a cooking class, 300 people signed up. But we can fit only 80 in each course." Because of the demand, the owners are considering hiring a full-time Bible worker.

Owners Don and Phyllis Yohe, both relatively new Adventists, say that joining the church changed their lives completely.

"In 1973, I was operating an oil business with 150 employees," Don says. "My main goal was to make money. I spent a great deal of time drinking and entertaining customers, and I was becoming an alcoholic without realizing it." His wife started attending an Adventist church and was baptized the same year. Don was baptized three years later, in 1976. They were both so delighted with their new life style, they wanted others to experience it. So they started Pure N'Simple in November 1982.

Don and Phyllis say, "if our store is successful in interesting people in the Bible and Jesus Christ, we will not enlarge; we will build another in a different location."