

Northern Pacific Coffee Company

By Brooke Mattox

Not just another coffee shop, Northern Pacific Coffee Company provides customers a place to relax with old and new friends, listen to local musicians, engage in conversation or fill a hungry belly.

Musician Stephen Minor founded the shop in 1994. Spanaway natives, Liz and Mike Myers purchased the shop and its name from Stephen in 2004. With that purchase, the couple inherited longtime patrons that continue to visit each day, hundreds of books and the eclectic furniture.

Mike says the customers enjoyed the atmosphere so much that only minimal changes have been made – such as adding additional kitchen space. Liz and Mike wanted to maintain and improve the shop so committed patrons would return often and tell their friends about the comfy Parkland hangout.

“It has a very unique and different look,” says Mike.

Admitting she didn’t know much about coffee five years ago, Liz’s vision for “a place of her own” was the reason the couple pursued the endeavor. With a background in deli and restaurant management, Liz was ready for a change and began seeking a shop. She found Northern Pacific Coffee Company and immediately knew this was to be the place she’d call her home away from home.

Since that time, word-of-mouth has been essential to continued stability and growth.

Live music continues to make this Garfield Street business a success. Customers enjoy poetry night on Tuesday – open microphone on the busiest day, Wednesday – live music Friday and Saturday – and, live jazz on Sunday morning. The play list and performers often change so customers experience a one-of-a-kind show. When music isn’t the main attraction, customers are often seen appreciating the locally made artwork that adorns the walls or are nestled into one of the cozy couches reading, studying or accessing free wireless Internet.

Musician Denny Foreman says he stops by the shop almost every day – whether it’s to perform or visit with other customers. Liz says Denny came with the shop when they bought it.

“I refused to leave,” says a laughing Denny.

He has been “hanging around” since he first performed for Northern Pacific Coffee Company visitors in 2001. Denny, a member of the jazz band, Two Plus Two, admires the talent derived from Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) students and other community bands.

“It’s a place where beginning artists get a start,” he says. “This is a very creative place.”

Each Sunday morning Denny can be found performing jazz at the shop. When asked if he has ever read any of the available books on the shelves, he said no but notes, “They absorb the music.”

Why does he return again and again? He says the restaurant provides, “A constant harvest of friendships – musical and otherwise.”

More than half of the employees are PLU students.

PLU senior, Emily Mkrtychian, has been an employee for the past four years. This trained barista has watched the crowd change and grow and seen the menu double in size. Her favorite menu item is a hummus veggie sandwich.

“It’s pretty much the coolest Parkland/PLU community mix,” says Emily.

Rebecca Taylor, a PLU student, has worked at the shop for two years. Like Emily, Rebecca takes orders and makes coffee and food.

“The people are my favorite thing,” says Rebecca.

Good food and coffee pair perfectly within this friendly and entertaining environment.

New items are added to the menu often to get a better sense of what people may want. Dozens of sandwiches, wraps, salads and burritos are readily available. Guests are always in for a treat with sandwiches such as Mr. Green Jean, Bull Durham, Focazza and, the best selling, Bibo. Customers also enjoy a selection of Caffe D'arte coffees.

Customers may also rent the more than 2,000 square feet for private parties or enjoy catering or lunch delivery. Those that refer another customer will receive ten percent off a future catering order.

A member of The Garfield Street Business Association, Liz’s service extends into the community. These business owners meet at least once a month to plan future association-sponsored events such as the street fair, holiday celebrations and annual art walk. The association is also involved in the Safe Streets program.

“It’s a network of businesses that can call on each other,” Liz says about the association.

Mike, a fulltime electrician, says his wife Liz, is at the shop almost every day. Liz believes in building relationships with the customers so it truly is like a second home.

“She goes out of her way to make them feel at home,” Mike says about Liz.

Northern Pacific Coffee Company is located at 401 Garfield Street. You may contact them by phone at 253-537-8338 or by e-mail at npcc@garfieldstreet.org.