

Young and old attracted to Greenwich Cafe

By Diane Andersen

You wouldn't even notice the faded blue and red sign unless you were looking for it. And the orange neon letters in the window proclaiming "FRIED CHICKEN" are all but lost amid the bright flashiness of the downtown night.

But once you enter the Greenwich Cafe, 1917 O St., all the quietness of its facade disappears. The old-timers and young college kids alike laugh and talk, as they have night after night in one of Lincoln's oldest bar and grills. "We've always had good people," said Mildred Weiler, 64. "It's like a family."

She and her husband, Francis, 62, took over the Greenwich Cafe about 10 years ago from his father, Francis Weiler Sr. Actually, Mrs. Weiler has worked there since 1939, when she started being a waitress for what she thought would be only a week, just to help out Francis Jr. and his parents.

"And here I am," she said.

Mrs. Weiler said she manages the Greenwich Cafe from the time it opens, 10 a.m., until midnight, Monday

through Saturday. Her husband, who is blind because of glaucoma, used to run the restaurant and cut all the meat, she said.

"He knows everybody in town," Mrs. Weiler said, adding that her husband enjoys visits from his friends, but doesn't get out much anymore.

"I don't work too hard," Mrs. Weiler insisted. "I take care of myself."

IT'S EASY to believe her claims, watching her yell



greetings to all her favorite customers, while at the same time keeping an eye on all the tables, kitchen, waitresses and bartenders.

"Some of the people that work here have been around for over 25 years," she said.

The Greenwich Cafe used to be the only place in Lincoln that served food and beer, before all the bars began serving liquor by the drink, said Mrs. Weiler.

She said the Greenwich houses more meat-cutting equipment than most butcher shops. In the 1930s, their menu boasted oyster stew for 20 cents a bowl, a chicken dinner for 35 cents, chili for 15 cents. T-bone steaks were 50 cents each.

Today the regulars come in for the popular fish and chips, which Mrs. Weiler said have been served for about seven years.

"We use good grease," she noted. "All that counts."

Some UNL professors were experimenting with some of the cafe's cooking equipment when they suggested she start serving fish and chips, Mrs. Weiler said. She heeded their advice and placed an advertisement in the Daily Nebraskan.

Ever since, they have been the restaurant's most popular dish, Mrs. Weiler said.

"PEOPLE ARE fish-conscious now," she said, noting that lines for the batter-fried fish used to run down the block on Friday nights.

"If I was smart, I'd put out a big sign (advertising fish and chips)," she said. "But I'm too old for that sort of thing."

Mildred Weiler is a thin, wrinkled woman with a lively voice and a mind of her own.

If drunks get rowdy in the Greenwich Cafe, she just "shoes them out" and holds the door behind them. But she insisted she enjoys most of her customers.

"When you work in a restaurant this long, you meet really nice people," she said.

"We've had a good life, though—really," she said. "Lincoln's been good to us."

Mrs. Weiler said she feels too many people put off their dreams until after retirement, then can't follow through with them when they are old or lack energy and good health.

"I thank God every day that we're here (at the Greenwich Cafe)," she said.

The beer glasses clink the customers laugh and talk. The Greenwich Cafe couldn't go on in this special way without Mildred Weiler. Nor, by her own admission, could she continue without the Greenwich.

Mrs. Weiler was born in Clay Center. She has been a Nebraskan all her life, and now lives at 5920 Sumner St. with her husband, whom she calls "Francie."

He was born and reared in Lincoln. His grandfather owned a packing house across from the bus depot on 10th Street, according to Mrs. Weiler. She said Francie stopped attending NU about 1940, and has been working at the Greenwich Cafe ever since.

They were married in 1945. The Weilers have no children, although Mrs. Weiler said she likes kids.

SHE EXPLAINED that her husband's sister looks after him during the day. The Weilers don't go out much anymore, she said.

"You should have fun while you're young," she added emphatically.

Mrs. Weiler said she went out drinking and dancing often in her younger days.

"You have to make your own excitement," she said.

Mrs. Weiler said many of the prices at the Greenwich Cafe have been too low and may have to be raised soon.

The cafe itself is small and narrow. Wooden booths and the bar fill the front room. The "red room, in the back, is open on Friday nights and is available for large parties with advance reservations. The Weilers have an offsale shop to the east of the restaurant.

"Everybody likes Francie," Mrs. Weiler said. "He's friendly. I'm all right in my way, but I'm kind of different."

After 39 years at the Greenwich Cafe, she insists she is happy working there every day.

"I just love it. Don't you?" she said.

In fact, her only complaints concern her husband's blindness. Mrs. Weiler said the doctors didn't treat his diabetes soon enough, and subsequent laser treatments failed to help him.

Grand Island bank donates \$40,000

GRAND ISLAND—The First National Bank of Grand Island announced recently that its board of directors has made a pledge of \$40,000 to the University of Nebraska Foundation "for the great needs facing the University."

The gift is in response to the Nebraska Bankers Association's support of the NU Foundation's \$25 million capital gifts campaign.

In making the announcement, the board stated that in accordance with the Bankers Association program, the income will be distributed annually by a Special Advisory Committee, composed of Banking and University officials. Grants will be based upon requests submitted by the University Campuses.

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