

Foray *the* into **Fifties**

Main Street Cafe leads double life as deli and bar

By Shelley Mika

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When you walk in the door, a ray of sun catches the chrome of a bar stool, and it seems like you've entered a '50s soda shop with a modern twist.

With one wall of shiny red booths and the black-and-white checkered floor, people may not guess they are in a bar — especially one on O Street.

But a look to the left boasts the shameful display of confiscated fake IDs, a look to the right delivers a glance of liquor bottles and beer taps, overhead Tracy Chapman's voice wails and you know you've entered a college bar.

Main Street Cafe's decor suggests a history, although it's own is short. As a cafe and bar, Main Street leads a sort of double life, and as it does its history in the making becomes twice as rich.

John Seltzer, part owner and manager of Main Street, 1325 O St., said his partners Tyler Olson and Mike Robinson found the space for the business.

"In November of 1995, my partners were walking by, going out to the bars and went, 'Why is that building empty?' and here we are today," Seltzer said.

Before it housed Main Street, the building was occupied by Guarantee Clothing for about 30 years, Seltzer said. Later the space became the site for Avant Card. Following Avant Card's move next door, the space went empty for about five years before finally becoming what it is today.

Seltzer said he and his partners began building Main Street in August 1995.

"We gutted the place; it took a month and a half to rip everything out. Then we did everything ourselves — the heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical work," Seltzer said.

Finally, a little more than a year after the idea for Main Street came about, the bar and cafe opened on

December 6, 1996.

From that day on, Main Street began its double life, serving primarily as a cafe during the day and a bar in the evening, much like the Peach Pit or the After Dark of "Beverly Hills 90210."

However, there are a few differences. For one, Main Street's approach to cuisine takes a decidedly healthy step away from typical tavern fare.

"People are more into not eating greasy food and want to get in and out on their lunch break," Seltzer said. "So we came up with the idea to serve hot subs that are quick and easy. That way you can go back to work without feeling like you have to take a nap afterward."

Jake Buss, a bartender at Main Street and a UNL senior psychology major, agreed with Seltzer.

"We have a kitchen that's not your regular greasy bar food. It's deli style, so that's one thing that sets Main Street apart from other bars," Buss said.

Nicole Anderson, a Main Street patron, said even though Main Street takes a different approach to its menu, it is still successful.

"It's definitely different," Anderson said. "They have a good variety; it's simple but it's good."

Anderson said day customers differ from the evening crowds.

"Lunch caters to downtown business people, and at night it's definitely a college crowd," Anderson said.

Seltzer agreed.

"During the daytime, it's business oriented, but college kids come in, too. College kids say it's weird to come in at noon when it's low key, and 12 hours later it's a different atmosphere," Seltzer said. "It's nice that we're able to do both sides."

In the evening, Main Street demonstrates the other side of its dual atmosphere, catering mostly to college students. The kitchen remains open until 8 p.m., but

instead of remaining a place to dine, the glass-brick counter's role unmistakably becomes to serve drinks.

As the last of the business people make their way out, the music is turned up a notch, and the lights are turned down. But Seltzer said Main Street keeps from becoming a typically grimy college bar.

"Everyone comes down and has fun, but it's clean and not too dark," Seltzer said.

Seltzer also said he felt there was a good deal of camaraderie at Main Street.

"I attribute much of my success to my employees. Half of them have been here since we opened. They care, and everyone is friends. It's kind of like a big family," Seltzer said.

"I know a lot of people who work at Main Street, and it's fun that we can all get together even when they're working," Anderson said. "Everyone seems like they know each other. There are a lot of familiar faces."

In between greeting customers by name, Buss said he also felt there is a good deal of intimacy between patrons and employees.

"I've worked here since day one, and I've seen the same faces for 3½ years," Buss said. "People come in knowing they'll know somebody. I think it's the beginning of a tradition."

Buss also offered another dimension to Main Street's already multi-faceted business personality.

"We're the only bar that boasts 'Hip Hop Happy Hour' on Fridays," Buss said with a chuckle.



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