

International Tea Room Offers Foods From Other Cultures

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EPHRATA — Part of the joy of traveling to a foreign country is tasting new and unusual foods. It is possible, however, to enjoy foods like shikunchce taeng-jang soup and pancet-gusado without leaving the country or traveling to a big city.

The Nav Jiwon International Tea Room offers these and other international dishes on a regular basis. The tea room, whose name means "new life," allows customers to experience foods of another culture in a relaxing, rather exotic atmosphere.

Open since 1982, the tea room has been operating in its present form for only about two years. It is located just north of Ephrata along Route 272 in the Self-Help store, operated by the Mennonite Central Committee.

The Mennonite Self-Help store features items from 30 countries throughout the world, and in itself is somewhat exotic. With the opening of the restaurant for breakfast and lunches, the international atmosphere is expanded.

Paul Leatherman, director of the store, the tea room and the wholesale division of Self-Help, explains that they wanted to have their customers experience the different smells and tastes of the Third World. To do this, the restaurant menus are coordinated with the rest of the shop. If the shop is featuring a particular country,

the restaurant will feature the meals of that country.

The featured country in the restaurant changes weekly. The decor changes monthly, featuring handicrafts which are sold in the store. They are displayed on the many antiques and on the walls of the small restaurant.

Leatherman noted that in the month of June wicker was featured in the store, so menus came from the Philippines and Bangladesh and other countries which market wicker products. The week of July 21 will feature food from Indonesia, and July 28, from Vietnam.

Leatherman says, with somewhat of an understatement, "The tea room offers a unique and unusual atmosphere."

The restaurant is operated with a combination of paid staff and MCC volunteers. The manager of the restaurant is Alverta Martin, who responds to the challenge of creating interesting food which will be appealing to the American taste. She came to the tea room with 12 years' experience operating her own restaurant at Meadowbrook Market which featured more traditional American food. She says she is enjoying the change of pace and philosophy, and finds herself serving unusual foods when she entertains.

She notes, "We use almost all fresh vegetables. Most of our customers really enjoy the food, and we see a lot of people coming



Toni Peters, center, an MCC volunteer from Canada, serves Alverta Martin and Paul Leatherman an entree from the Philippines. The decor of the restaurant is changed mostly to reflect the area of the world being featured.

back."

Recipes come from a wide variety of sources, but many are contributed by Mennonite Central Committee workers who have lived in foreign lands. Often these workers will also return with cookbooks, which Alverta peruses to find new dishes.

Leatherman, who himself travels a great deal in seeking out potential sources for handcrafted items, says, "The MCC has workers in 50 countries and we all have our favorite recipes or things we like, and we bring that back with us."

There are some concessions made to local tastes. Leatherman notes, "American tastes are different, and while we want foods to be authentic, they must also be acceptable to the American public. We must be able to sell to people here what they like. Our dishes must be within acceptable bounds to our palates."

In some cases this means lessening the spices. While this is disappointing to natives of those countries, most Americans cannot handle the fully spiced food of some foreign countries.

Leatherman states, "We have found that the hotter the weather of a country, the hotter the food." He says Pakistan is a country which uses a lot of spices in cooking. He laughingly recalls a visit to Indonesia where he stayed in a guest house which served local food. After a week he commented to his hosts that the food seemed to be getting spicier. The host explained that they had purposely cut back on the amount of spices, increasing them slowly. He commented that in about three weeks the food would be spiced to the taste of natives!

To find the appropriate foods and spices, Martin uses an Indian food store in Akron and an oriental shop in Lancaster.

Leatherman notes, "We are specifically not competing with anyone else around. We offer a different sort of experience, and we try to keep it quite unique."

Indeed, served along with the food is a pamphlet describing the country being featured, as well as a sheet explaining just what is in the featured recipes.

For those less adventuresome, the menu offers a few more traditional foods, including a child's plate. Martin explains that all foods are selected with thought to good nutrition at low cost. They tend to use the Third World eating patterns of small amounts of meat. Hence you will find a fruit and cheese plate as well as a bread and fruit plate. Fresh fruit drinks are offered as well. And the cost for any item on the limited menu is

extremely reasonable.

Breakfast has been a fairly recent addition to the restaurant, and there is slightly less emphasis on the Third World in those menus. Recent offerings included almond French toast and bacon quiche and fruit.

Response to the restaurant has

been good, but people are still discovering it. Some visitors are customers of the store, lured by the wonderful smells coming from the kitchen. Some are natives of a featured country, eager to taste some food from their own experience. And many visitors

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Attractive centerpieces add to the exotic atmosphere in the international tea room. All the pieces used in the decor are for sale in the shop itself. Most of the furniture is antique and fresh flowers add to the pleasant atmosphere.



This sign often helps bring in customers to the tea room by telling the public which country is being featured. Usually the featured country coincides with a promotion in the shop itself.

Homestead Notes

A Word About SelfHelp...

The Mennonite SelfHelp program is celebrating its 40th year in 1986, providing a marketing outlet for products from 30 countries around the world.

SelfHelp store director Paul Leatherman explains, "We help to sell what craftsmen in other countries make. We pay them at the time they are made, and the producers receive an adequate wage based on the local economy."

Presently the SelfHelp program is touching the full-time equivalent of 16,200 people. However, since many of the workers make the crafts part time, Leatherman estimates that the program touches about ¼ million people, allowing them to make money to help care for themselves.

The SelfHelp program buys directly from the producers, eliminating the middle man. Leatherman said they are able to keep their costs low because two thirds of the staff consists of volunteers. "We can pay more for an item and still be competitive because of the volunteers." The

store is operated on a non-profit, self-supporting basis.

He makes it very clear that the SelfHelp store is not an ordinary gift shop. "We are here for the benefit of the producers, not just to have the best gift shop. We want to be sure that neither the producer nor the customer is taken advantage of. Our motivation is to help people make a living who otherwise couldn't make a living."

Among the continuing best sellers in the shop are carved wood and brass from India. Creche sets are also very popular, according to Leatherman. He adds, "We have a lot of very unique items." They also carry a wide variety of oriental rugs.

He said that the store always looks different because of changes in items being offered or featured. Furthermore, he said he is always getting requests from countries with additional items to sell.

The SelfHelp shop offers an unusual shopping experience, and combined with a visit to the tea room, an international atmosphere without leaving home.