

Background

“I began working in my father’s restaurant in Myers Flat at age six washing glasses and silver ware. I stood on a turned over fruit crate so I could reach the sink. I was 10 when I began waiting on tables. Who would have thought I would still be doing this 50 years later?” says Carol. Though those who know her or who have eaten any of her meals, recognize that this is her passion, which is reflected in every morsel of food.

Carol arrived at Lake Almanor in 1971 when her late husband Kenneth Wilson brought her here to help with the family business, Wilson’ Camp Prattville, now the oldest family-run business on Lake Almanor. Carol fell in love with the area immediately, and without any hesitation or doubt she was “home,” she rolled up her sleeves and began cleaning cabins, bathrooms and anything else that needed to be done.

“The focus at that time was running the campground and keeping a fully stocked grocery store that had everything our guests would need so they didn’t have to go into town,” she explains. Closed off from the store was a former restaurant and it was Carol’s thought that if they were providing everything for their guests, why not a restaurant as well?

Though the notion of re-opening the restaurant, which had been closed for seven years, was not well-received at first, those who know Carol, that wasn’t going to stop her. She opened Carol’s Café in May of 1971 and though she faced some lean years, sometimes only making \$25 a day, she persevered and continues today now serving the fifth generation of some of her original guests. “That tells me I have been doing something right,” she says with a laugh. But it is not only her food. Carol takes the time to make you feel special and welcomed. Something she said she learned working with her father those many years ago.

Carol oversees and participates in the crafting of all the food, which patrons who eat there regularly have come to recognize as “consistently delicious and mouth-watering good.” Though her menu has changed some, the basic concept of “comfort food” with fresh ingredients is what has made guests return again and again.

Carl's Café is not her only accomplishment. Never one to be too idle and always wanting to "master her craft," Carol enrolled in a two-year correspondence course through the National Restaurant Association and received her certificate in Restaurant Management. After her husband passed, Carol took classes at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, St. Helena, CA, completing enough classes to graduate as a certified 'Chef de Cuisine'. Later, she co-founded the Almanor Culinary Academy in Chester, CA, and taught there for three years. When the program was moved to the Feather River College in Quincy, Carol worked as an associate instructor for several years. She is a registered proctor and instructor for the ServSafe food safety program. Still "on the move," she took more courses and received a Liberal Arts Degree at the young age of 64 years. And her drive continues with opening a bakery May 1 with an enticing selection of espressos, teas and delicious pastries; and her Mother's Day Brunch received raved reviews as her "best yet!"

Everything Carol does is a labor of love. Her food, her baking and her commitment to her community, are extraordinary. She truly is a force -- a wonderful one with an infectious smile and no-nonsense attitude. Her hands and creative mind craft wonderful food, but her journey creates a great lesson in life. Carol's favorite quote is by Executive Chef Tory McPhail, "I come to work to live my passion". And from the results of 50 years, anyone who has had the pleasure of being in Carol's presence and enjoyed one of her meals, knows she has embraced and surpassed this quote.

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Carol invites you to join her 50th Anniversary Celebration on Saturday, September 11. She invites anyone who has worked at the café or enjoyed a meal (or two) to send in a picture with name/date or a written memory of your time at Carol's to be posted on her "Memory Wall." Send to carolscafe@earthink.net or mail to Carol's Café, 2932 Almanor West Drive, Lake Almanor, CA, 96020.

Carol's Café hours are Wednesday to Saturday, 7:30am to 2:00pm for breakfast and lunch. Sunday Supper from 4:30pm to 7:30pm. Bakery and Espresso Bar open daily at 7:00am. 530.259.2464; CarolsPrattvilleCafe.com