

Taste OF THE TOWN

Good Food Served With A Smile At Dr. Jazz

Merrille MacLellan, George Hessler opened the Webster soda fountain, grill in 2008



Proprietors of Dr. Jazz in Webster Groves modeled their restaurant after the one in Lebanon, Ill.

photo courtesy of Dr. Jazz



Dr. Jazz owners, Merrille "Sissy" MacLellan and George Hessler stand behind the 1930s soda fountain of their eatery at 29 E. Gore in Webster Groves.

photo courtesy of Dr. Jazz



Three young customers, from left, Katherine Jackson, 10, Lauren Wallace, 6, and Kaitlyn Wallace, 9, enjoy their ice cream treats.

photo by Diana Linsley



Dr. Jazz server / soda jerk Kelly Berry, a Webster Groves High School senior, puts the finishing touches on a sundae.

photo by Diana Linsley



Two popular items at Dr. Jazz are the Chicago-style jumbo dog served with homemade French fries, left, and the signature Cashew Salad with homemade raspberry vinaigrette dressing.

photo by Diana Linsley

Dr. Jazz's hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; closed on Monday

by Marty Harris

While Dr. Jazz in Webster Groves has only been open since October 2008, it has the feel of a friendly, old-time soda fountain and grille. That's just the way owners Merrille "Sissy" MacLellan and her husband George Hessler want it.

Stepping into the eatery, located at 29 N. Gore, is like stepping back to the 1930s. The soda fountain dates to the late 1930s complete with bar stools that twirl. Behind it is a dark wood-paneled wall from 1894 which holds shelves filled with glasses, sundae bowls and such.

The paneled wall came from Dr. Jazz in Lebanon, Ill., of which the Webster Groves located was modeled.

According to Hessler, his wife wanted to open an ice cream shop as a retirement venture for the couple. The long-time Webster Groves residents drove around for a year looking for locations. Then within a week three people told them about a Dr. Jazz in Lebanon owned by Paul Krumsieg.

"We have the naming rights and hired him (Krumsieg) as a consultant, MacLellan said.

Since opening in Webster Groves, the diner has exceeded its owners' expectations – how it's been received by the community, and how the restaurant itself looks and feels, according to MacLellan.

"I just think it is something to be really proud of," she said.

And she obviously is. That pride extends to the food.

"The Best Cheeseburger Anywhere"

"We have the best cheeseburger anywhere – and the best ice cream," she said. She noted that the ice cream is Wisconsin's award-winning Cedar Crest Ice Cream and the hamburger has a very low fat content yet is still juicy and favorable.

The food convinced MacLellan to open Dr. Jazz.

"I did two things when we talked to Paul (Krumsieg) about doing this. I ate

a cheeseburger and had a George Bailey sundae. That sold me," she said.

MacLellan pointed out other menu favorites such as the signature Italian Beef Sandwich made with top round, the Traditional Turkey Bacon Club, the signature Cashew Salad with house-made raspberry vinaigrette dressing, plus Chicago-style, all-beef hot dogs.

"We also serve Biegnets, French donuts like they serve in the French Quarter in New Orleans and we have Decatur Street coffee, a mild chicory coffee," MacLellan added.

"I love our menu," she said. "I have eaten everything on it. The only thing I don't like are the mushrooms and we're replacing them with fried green beans which are delicious.

"Everything we make is fresh or home made, including the French fries," MacLellan stressed. "The ice cream is all hand dipped – nothing from a machine."

Friendly Service

Another source of pride for MacLellan are the cooks and servers which provide fast, friendly service.

Three of the couple's five children help with the restaurant as floor managers: Sharon Hornbeck, Theresa Oliphant and Penny Lois. Grandson Justin Lois likes to pitch in as a server and soda jerk when not in school at Avery Elementary.

All but one of the staff live in Webster Groves, and all the servers, but one attend Webster Groves High School, MacLellan said.

"We have an exceptional staff. They're good workers, level headed," she said. "I can't say enough about them."

Patrons attest to the friendly service and good food.

"We always come in here," said Michele Long, operations director of Visiting Angels in Webster Groves, who was enjoying a late lunch on a recent afternoon. "They always have time for you and they're personable."

Her co-worker Charlene Slates agreed.

"I like that you can call for take-out for lunch," Slates added. "When you come to pick it up, it's ready and you get a friendly smile. And I love the fried green beans."

"It's just been a real pleasure to serve all the people who have come in here," MacLellan said.

"We Love Kids"

That include kids.

"We love kids," Hessler said.

MacLellan pointed out the hand colored ice cream cones which hang around the restaurant – all colored by the young patrons. One young customer, Max, has six brightly-colored cones hung in a chain.

For birthday parties or other events, Dr. Jazz has a small party room in the back of the eatery with a TV.

Upcoming Changes

Customers may notice some "green" changes at Dr. Jazz in the coming months. The owners have joined the Green Restaurant Association.

According to MacLellan, the association will come out and consult with the owners, but they are already taking some green steps of their own.

"We're very conscious – all of us – of the environment," said MacLellan. She said they are disposing of all styrofoam containers and replacing them with biodegradable ones.

"We're serving almost all food in baskets so we don't have to wash so many dishes," said MacLellan, noting it cuts down on water usage.

"We recycle all cardboard and anything else we can," said Hessler.

This summer, young and old alike can enjoy a new addition at Dr. Jazz.

"We will have a patio in the back with a walk-up window," said MacLellan.

Dr. Jazz is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., closed on Monday. For more information, call 961-JAZZ (5299) or visit the Web site, www.drjazzsodafountain.com.