

THE RYE RECORD

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Home Plate

Luncheonettes: Survival of the Fittest

By Janice Llanes Fabry

At a time when high-priced and trendy restaurants that don't take reservations are flourishing, hometown luncheonettes seem to be an endangered species. While they are a category overlooked by Zagat's restaurant guides, regular patrons will tell you these nostalgic, comfort food establishments are not the dinosaurs you'd think.

Local luncheonettes, like **Poppy's** and **On the Way Café**, are alive and well in different parts of town. Thanks to them, counters and stools and quality and prices of yesteryear have not become extinct in Rye.

A mainstay of Rye, **Poppy's** on Purchase Street has been around for 15 years. Where else, but in one's own kitchen perhaps, can kids play with alphabet refrigerator magnets and enjoy a home-cooked meal at the

same time? Here, locals line the counter, and bacon and sausages sizzle on the grill. Behind the counter,



Poppy's owner Gerri Massimello

you'll almost always find owner Gerri Massimello and JoAnn Amico, both longtime Rye residents who know patrons by name and work six days a week.

Massimello opened Poppy's together with her father, Robert Chapterlane, who was affectionately known as "Poppy." The former Rye police officer died five years ago. Massimello has always been conscious of good food and low prices. "We try to remember to keep prices affordable for everyone," she said.

Poppy's prime downtown location attracts many young families all weekend long. In addition to the 14 counter stools, there are only four tables in the back. If you have small kids, it is best to get there early. The "regulars" all seem to prefer sitting at the counter, where they can be part of the action all week long.

Poppy's
27 Purchase St., Rye
967-1544

Hours: Breakfast/Lunch
Mon.-Sat. 6 a.m. - 3 p.m.;
Sunday 8 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Price Range: \$2 for bacon and
egg on a roll with coffee; \$13
for a burger deluxe, a side,
beverage and dessert
Take-out, free delivery avail.
No credit cards accepted

Eggs are served any style, all day, with delicious home fries. Burgers, hot and cold sandwiches, tuna and egg salad platters with homemade potato salad are also on the menu. A "Great Balls of Fire Platter" includes hot wings, a cup of chili and spicy fries. A "Cholesterol Special" offers plenty of LDL with three-cheese grilled cheese and cheese fries. Children's selections include smaller portions of breakfast and lunch items, including peanut butter and jelly. My personal favorite, the legendary chocolate egg cream, is even better than I remember. And no matter how close Starbuck's is, there's something special about a good cup of coffee in a Santa mug in July.

On The Way Café
34 Ridgeland Terrace, Rye
925-0049

Hours: Breakfast/Lunch
Tues.-Sun. 7 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Price Range: \$3.25 for bacon and
egg on a roll with coffee; \$12 for
a wedge or wrap, beverage and
dessert
Catering available
No credit cards accepted



Across from Rye Playland, tucked away next to a gas station off Forest Avenue, is **On The Way Café**. This light-filled, country luncheonette is a little fancier and roomier than Poppy's. It's decorated with checkered curtains, a local artist's watercolors and American artifacts. Vintage baby bowls, hand-painted nightstands and pewter pitchers are for sale. Most important, the French toast is fluffy and good even without syrup and thick waffles are topped off with fresh fruit.

Chef and owner Neil Aniello took over the luncheonette two years ago. He renovated the entire space, upgrading the kitchen and removing the grill from behind the counter.

During an impromptu tour of the kitchen, I could see everything was

spotless and ingredients were fresh. Aniello enjoys interaction with the customers. He installed an open window on the kitchen wall, so he can keep an eye on his guests, as well as on his food. He makes every-

thing himself and likes to keep the menu simple. "There are very few things I trust anyone else doing," he explained. He even did the decorating, hanging his own stained glass windows on the wall.

The café's lunch items include pear and gorgonzola salad; grilled chicken with arugula, tomato and pesto mayo on a baguette; burgers; and pasta. Delicious homemade pies (lemon meringue, banana custard, peach) are also available. Aniello caters parties and barbecues with such offerings as filet mignon, roast chicken, lentil salad, couscous and shish kebabs. For great Sunday brunch specials, it's not unusual to find On The Way Café's seating completely full. Have patience, as the tables turn over fairly quickly. It's worth the wait.



Owner Neil Aniello, at left, with On the Way Café staff