



Panera Opens Pay-What-You-Wish Location in Oregon

Panera to open nonprofit restaurant in Portland, Ore.; customers pay what they wish

By Sarah Skidmore, Associated Press

January 12, 2011

Panera Bread Co. will open a nonprofit restaurant Monday in Portland where customers can pay what they wish for food.

It's the third "Panera Cares" community cafe for the company and its first West Coast location.

Panera opened community cafes last year in Clayton, Mo., and Dearborn, Mich. The restaurants are owned and operated by a nonprofit arm of the national restaurant chain, which receives no profit from the business.

"In some ways it is a test for humanity," said Ron Shaich, founder of Panera who launched the concept for the company. "Will people step up and help each other or will they take advantage?"

So far, people have stepped up. Panera said about 20 percent of the visitors to the cafes leave more than the suggested amount, 20 percent leave less and 60 percent pay what is suggested.

Those who are not able to pay anything do not have to, but the cafe suggests they volunteer their time in support of the organization.

"This is not about a handout," Shaich said. "This is about a hand up, and every one of us has a need for that at some point in our lives."

There are a number of other independent community kitchen formats already in existence around the country such as those in Denver and Salt Lake City. Panera, however, is one of the first chain restaurants to make the leap.

The company is converting an existing Panera restaurant in the Hollywood neighborhood into the community cafe format. Panera looked at a number of potential sites around the country but said that it felt the "sensibility" of Portland suited the project. The company also tries to place restaurants in economically diverse neighborhoods that can support the format.

If there is excess revenue, Shaich said it will be reinvested in the community such as using the cafe as a work-training site for at-risk youth.

"I think the people of Portland will do the right thing," Shaich said.

Shaich said he would like to open more community cafes but must see first if the existing sites prove self-sustainable.

Copyright 2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.