

Lunch in the Lode

PICKLE PATCH OFFERS FRESH FOOD, ATMOSPHERE

Today, *The Record* introduces its new restaurant review policy. The policy standardizes the criteria reviewers will use to judge restaurants. Reviews will be written by *Record* staff writers but will appear without bylines to help ensure that staffers do not receive special treatment or additional services while dining at restaurants being reviewed.

Restaurants will now be graded using the following five-star system:

★★★★★ *Excellent. An exceptional dining experience.*

★★★★ *Very good. An enjoyable dining experience.*

★★★ *Average. A reliable dining experience.*

★★ *Fair. An unfavorable dining experience.*

★ *Poor. A miserable dining experience.*

Reviewers will revisit a restaurant before writing a review that assigns a restaurant one or two stars. This will help avoid penalizing a restaurant that is having an "off" day.

Price (average cost of dinner entrée) will be rated as:

- *Expensive. \$25 and above*
- *Moderate. \$16-\$20*
- *Value. \$15 and under*

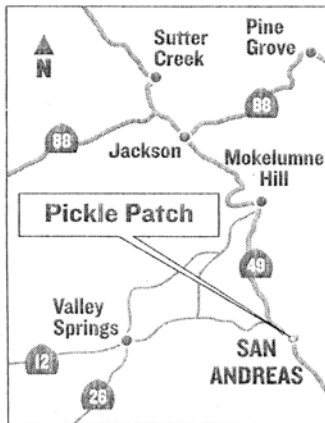
A copy of the policy can be viewed on the Web at www.recordnet.com. Go to LENS, the Dining page.

SAN ANDREAS — Out-of-towners might not notice the Pickle Patch Deli and Garden as they zoom into San Andreas on Highway 49.

The restaurant on the edge of town occupies a small bungalow built in 1939. Its expansive decks and patios are hidden behind the house. People who do see the sign and ease up on the gas in time to slide into the driveway will be rewarded with fresh-made salads and sandwiches.

They will also get to watch the local elite in action: The Pickle Patch is the favored meeting spot for local business and government leaders.

"There's always room for you to have a meeting without being surrounded by people," said Gretel Tiscornia, the restaur-



RICK HUDOCK/The Record

FOOD REVIEW

Pickle Patch

★★★★

Where: 577 W. Saint Charles

St., San Andreas

Information: (209) 754-1978

Type of food: Sandwiches, salads, quiche

Bathrooms: Clean

Atmosphere: Casual, most seating outdoors

Parking: Lot next to deli

Price: Value

The restaurant offers 22 seats inside and 100 outside. Where the covered deck gives way to open patios. The tables are supplied with generous shade umbrellas to fend off the sometimes-fierce Mother Lode sun. The landscaping is immaculately maintained, with beds of black-eyed Susans and sweet alyssum next to an ancient grapevine climbing a new trellis.

Tiscornia said wine growers have told her the vine is at least 50 years old and may date to when the house was built.

The food matches the surroundings. Tiscornia buys local herbs, produce and supplies as much as possible, although she says she has been forced to go to Valley distributors for bagels.

She and her eight employees use seasonal produce in their specials. For example, they included fresh basil leaves in a recent cucumber salad.

The salads on the regular menu will appeal to health-conscious customers. The broccoli chicken salad, for example, includes red raisins, red onions,

sunflower seeds and chicken.

The slightly tangy ranch dressing for this salad, like other dressings used here, is made fresh on the premises, Tiscornia said, and it is available as either a main course (\$7.95) or as a side salad with a sandwich.

House sandwiches range from \$5.50 for the Sorry Charlie tuna to \$7.95 for the Big Bravo, a combination of pepperoni, salami and turkey with pepperoncini, olives, mustard, mayonnaise and other fixings on a soft roll.

The deli will also make a variety of sandwiches to order for \$6.50 with just meat and fixings, or \$7 with cheese. Customers order at the cash register after they enter the bungalow's front door. Then they head outside to find a table.

At the start of the lunch rush on a recent Tuesday, it took the staff six minutes to deliver the spinach quiche and Caesar salad special (\$7.95), and an Anna sprout sandwich (\$5.95) to the table.

Tall glasses of water and ice tea also arrived with lemon wedges and plenty of ice.

The rich moistness of the avocado and cream cheese contrasted nicely with the slightly coarse texture of the wheat bread in the Anna sprout sandwich (made with cream cheese, red onions, avocado, tomatoes, cucumbers and sprouts on wheat bread).

The quiche — the highlight of the quiche and Caesar salad special — had a light, custardy texture without being watery, a sign it was baked carefully at just the right texture.

It had enough bacon and cream in it to balance the spinach and make it filling without being too rich.

The Caesar salad was only average, with the vinegar in the dressing drowning out any hint of the traditional anchovies. But the slice of asiago-roasted garlic bread that came with the Caesar was excellent. Tiscornia said she buys the bread undercooked and finishes it in her ovens to give it the proper texture.

Questions? Comments? Contact LENS Editor Linda Hughes-Kirchubel at (209) 546-8260 or lkirch@recordnet.com