

# Tea Talk

By Joyce A. Whitaker, owner of the Painted Lady Tea Room

My focus this week is of a personal nature. Every day we graciously prepare for our tea room guests by making sure our house is in order. We clean, shop, prepare delicious specialty foods and we even comply with our customers requests for special dietary needs or their favorite recipes. You see, we feel as though we are entertaining family and friends, just as if they were in our home. We provide friendly, courteous service and we smile freely as we greet the welcomed customers who come into our establishment. Yet no matter how hard we try, there are some who simply don't get it! They come in frowning, impatient and demanding and they often talk down to our servers. They want everything for nothing and they seem not to appreciate what it takes to deliver what we strive to do.

First, we are not a fast food place! Each and every dish is made from scratch. The food is healthy and fresh and the quality is consistent. We encourage our customers to tell us if there is a problem with their food and they very well do. This doesn't happen often, but we believe in the old saying "if something is wrong, tell us, not others." On the reverse side we like to know when things are right.

We have noticed recently that a few customers, seems more than normal, come in with an attitude. They are rude, grumpy and impatient. They complain about prices and they seem to take their problems out on our hard working servers. I don't know if it is the stress of every day life like everything going up in price or the hectic environment we live in, but my point is, when you go to tea or lunch, or even dinner, you should be enjoying yourself. Have fun, relax and let us make your day brighter. We try to make every activity one that you will remember with graciousness.

I leave you with these thoughts:

Servers are in one of the most stressful careers. They are in a lower paying profession and they depend on tips to make a living. In Europe today gratuity is added to every bill. We even had to add an 18-20 percent gratuity because our servers were not being tipped or were tipped very little. We did not want to do this but more and more food service establishments are.

Restaurants are very hard work and are expensive to run. Profit margins are low with one-third going to help, one-third to staff and the remaining expenses coming out of what is left. With food prices going up drastically and consistently, it is even harder just to stay open in some cases. Remember that taxes, utilities, high cost property and liability insurance and maintenance also add to the equation. The profit margin is slim to none with some operating in the red for many years in the beginning.

Tea rooms are not chains nor are they fast food as I mentioned before. They provide tasty fresh, made from scratch menus because they want to be exceptional. Usually if you compare prices, you are comparing boil in the bag or frozen packaged foods with added preservatives to fresh, healthy foods made daily in the tea room kitchen. And, the

prices for the most part are equal or less than a dollar more, plus you have a personal experience by dining in a lovely setting that is unique.

My point to all of this is that tea rooms are opened because the owners want to serve others by providing a relaxing, memorable experience that encourages customers to slow down and smell the roses. They feature an atmosphere that says, "relax and stay awhile." These business owners are not in business to get rich, they are in the business to serve and make each and every customer who enters special. When our guests leave, we want to know that they enjoyed the experience so much that they will come back and bring others to share in our ambience.