

# Smoke-free

## White Grill owner puts away the ashtrays

By Peggy Scott  
For the Leader

For the first time in more than 60 years, the only thing smoking at the White Grill restaurant in Festus is the grill.

The restaurant, 218 Main St., went smoke free as of Jan. 4.

Despite a snow storm and frigid temperatures, owner Caroline LaBrayere said the week that followed was one of the restaurant's best ever.

LaBrayere said she was fearful when she made the decision to ban smoking at her restaurant. For years, regulars have come in for breakfast and lunch and have lingered to smoke a cigarette and to chat.

But LaBrayere said it was time for a change at White Grill.

"It's a new year, and I'm going to start the new year by going non-smoking," she said. "My restaurant is small. With all the restaurants going smoke-free, all the smokers are converging in on me, and this place is just too small. I was tired of the mess and the smoke."

Over the holidays, she repainted the restaurant with fresh, white walls.

"We 'de-smoked,'" she said. "We tried to get rid of all traces of cigarettes. We're still cleaning. That smoke gets all over everything."

She threw away the ashtrays.

"It's nice not having to clean those," she said.

On Jan. 4, she opened with some trepidation.

"I was scared at first, but you would not believe how happy people have been," LaBrayere said. "I'm really surprised."

She said most of her regulars who are smokers have told her they will remain regulars. "They said, 'We come in for the food. We can go an hour without a cigarette,'" "

After the change was announced, she said, a few customers said they wouldn't be back.

"But there were a lot of people I know who didn't come in because of the smoke," she said. "I think the ones I'll lose I'm going to make up."

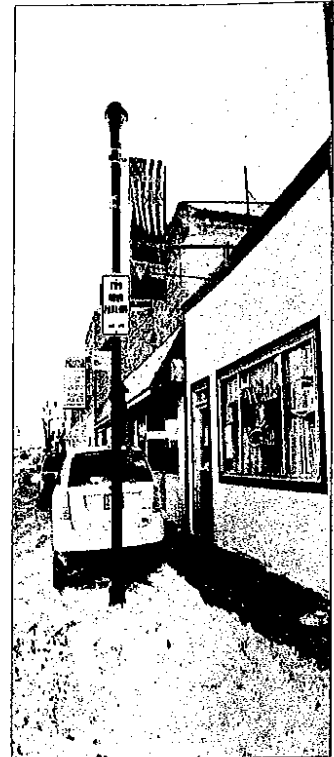


White Grill owner Caroline LaBrayere, 48, center, with customers Mona Vuichard and Jeff Reddick, both of Festus.

a good week. The non-smokers – you would not believe how many have come in. They have even called me on the phone

and said thanks."

White Grill diner Jeff Reddick of Festus, who is a smoker, said he will con-



White Grill, 218 Main St., in Festus.

tinue to eat at the White Grill.

"The food is good here, and the service is excellent," he said. "And eventually everywhere will be smoke-free, so might as well get used to it."

LaBrayere is a smoker also. "I'm al-

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**Trivia Night**

**When:** Saturday, January 16, 2010  
**Where:** St. Pius X High School Ralph Boyer Gymnasium  
**Time:** Doors open at 6 p.m.  
 Trivia Starts: 6:30 p.m.

**Cost:** \$15 per person  
 (Drinks & Snacks provided)  
 8 to a table max.  
 (Decorating your table is optional)

Sponsored by: St. Pius X Alumni

**Call Paula to reserve  
your spot at  
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*"A Taste of Tchaikovsky"*

Valentina Igoshina  
Russian classical pianist

**Rickman Auditorium**  
 Sunday, March 7, 2010  
 2:00 p.m.

# White Grill: Went smoke-free Jan. 4

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ways trying to quit," she said. But the choice to ban smoking at the restaurant was a business decision. She said she will take her own smoking outside.

"You've got kids who come in here, and I hate to see cigarette smoke blowing in their faces," she said. "I was tired of dealing with that. And people were complaining about the smoke."

She hoped that the Festus City Council would force her decision by banning smoking at all restaurants in the city.

However, the proposal by Ward 4 Councilman Sam Richards met with some resistance from other council members who said the city shouldn't dictate how businesses are run. Richards initially wanted Festus voters to choose, but state law doesn't

allow such a referendum for a third-class city like Festus.

Richards said he intends to keep working for a city ordinance that bans smoking at Festus restaurants.

"I'm still working on it. I don't intend to let it drop," he said.

He counts the White Grill's decision to ban smoking as a victory.

"I heard through the grapevine that White Grill was going to go smokeless," Richards said. "It tickles me that they made that decision."

Richards said he spoke to LaBrayere about his no-smoking proposal before he

proposed it to the City Council in November. "She said she thought it was the wave of the future, but she wasn't happy about it at the time," he said.

"There is this illusion that changing to smoke-free causes you to lose business and it is actually not factual," Richards said. "There are many, many statistics out there that show when cities or counties make this change, most of the time business picks up."

LaBrayere said her experience backs up Richards' claims.

"I was hoping the smoking thing would pass, and I'd have had an excuse," she said.

But when it appeared that the council would not make a decision any time soon, LaBrayere decided to make the change on her own.

"I was really scared," she said. "But then I was really surprised by

the support I've had - even from the smokers. They said, 'We'll be back. Don't worry.'"

The White Grill has operated on Festus Main Street under different owners since 1938.

"This is the first time the White Grill is smoke-free," LaBrayere said.

The restaurant is open for breakfast and lunch seven days a week. It closes at 2 p.m. every day except Sunday, when the restaurant closes at noon.

Festus now has four restaurants that allow smoking: Tanglefoot, Petit Patee, Ruby Tuesday and Waffle House.



Sherree Faries photos  
"Order up!" says Christina LaBrayere, 19, White Grill cook and Caroline LaBrayere's daughter.

# Wedding Fair: Will be held Jan. 31

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den of De Soto and the Bridal Shoppe of Crystal City. Experts from both shops will be on hand to answer questions

easy process. They have to qualify. They have to show proof of income and can't make too much money, but they can't make too little money. And every family must put in 375 hours of 'sweat equity.'"

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