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Wheeler's Open Crabpot Cafe *by Damara Burnett*



Each morning at ten a.m., fresh, hot bread comes out of Chris and Tata Wheeler's ovens. Two types of bread - white and wheat - are then stacked on trays and allowed to cool. Moments later the doors of the Crabpot Cafe & Gallery are opened, and the day's first customers walk in.

Although the cafe is a new eating option in Seldovia this year, selling sandwiches at the Crabpot isn't new for the Wheelers. They first opened the deli in 2000, but then closed for a few years after their daughter, Alliah, was born. Early this summer they decided to open again, with a few additions.

They've added artwork, for example. The restaurant section of the building now houses sixty original oil paintings - all done by Chris Wheeler (with the exception of four paintings by Tata). Chris started painting while he was in high school in Las Vegas. An art teacher at the school introduced him to oil painting and he's been making art ever since. Visitors to the Crabpot can stroll the gallery and view the paintings, even if they don't stay for lunch.

Last year, a pool table was purchased and added to the premises. The Wheeler's also bought a new "fixing bar," so customers can make their own sandwiches, if they wish.

There are eight types of cold deli sandwiches to choose from at the Crabpot Cafe, including turkey, pastrami, roast beef, and ham. Half-sandwiches start at \$5.25. Whole-sandwiches run around \$8.50. There are also hot lunch specials - like the French dip or the barbeque pork sandwich - and bowls of clam chowder. Customers always have their choice of white or wheat bread, and they can add any extra fixings to their sandwiches.

Two of the cooks, Adrienne Cameron and Samantha Herndon, said that roast beef sandwiches are a top seller.

"And most people want you to put their fixings on for them," Adrienne added.

The Crabpot also sells hand-tossed pizzas on Friday nights from 5:00 - 8:30 p.m. They make all the basic pizzas - like Pepperoni - plus a Hawaiian, Super Combo, and Vegetarian pizza. Prices range from \$8.99



for a small cheese pizza to \$19.99 for a large Super Combo pizza.

Chris Wheeler noted that a new cook, with substantial restaurant experience, will be arriving soon to help manage the cafe.

"We may do more than just sandwiches," Chris said. "We'll get up to speed and then decide what to add [to the menu]."

Chris Wheeler first came to Alaska in 1969. He worked as a crab-fisherman for fifteen years and in that time built the structure that houses the Crabpot grocery store today. The store was initially called "Wheeler's Store." He closed it for awhile in the late 1980's and then reopened it under the "Crabpot" name in 1997.

"We use to sell three times as much groceries back in those days," Chris said.

Tata Wheeler is originally from Mindanao in the Philippines . She came to Seldovia in 1996.

The Crabpot Cafe & Art Gallery is open seven days a week, from 10 am-5p.m., with inside and outside seating available.