

Staying green and friendly

Local restaurant owner aims to connect with each of her loyal patrons.



ROB JOHNSON/THE DAILY IOWAN

Barb Farnsworth helps husband Dick Farnsworth clean at Her Soup Kitchen on Monday. The restaurant uses produce from local growers and from the Farmers' Market.

By JENNIFER DOWNING

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Barb Farnsworth knows how to make a good chicken noodle soup.

It all starts with the broth, which the restaurant owner likes to make herself. Then she adds chicken, perfectly cooked, of course, on the grill. In an ideal preparation, the noodles are handmade egg noodles from the Kalona Bakery, a family-owned bakery in Iowa's Amish community. And to finish off her creation, Farnsworth adds carrots she has either grown herself in one of her five gardens or bought locally.

Farnsworth, 57, is the owner of Her Soup Kitchen, an environmentally conscious restaurant in Iowa City combining homegrown foods with healthy ingredients in a family-orientated atmosphere.

"What we want to do is nourish the neighborhood and locally source, as best as possible, our meats and produce," she said.

For years, Farnsworth and her husband, Dick Farnsworth, wanted to open up a restaurant of their own. Finally, when a space at 625 S. Dubuque St. became available May 2009, she decided it was the perfect time to bring her family back together.

So, Barb Farnsworth quit her job at PIP Print-

ing, her husband closed his business Farnsworth Automotive and Air, and her son, Jason, moved back to Iowa City from San Francisco.

"Our whole family has always enjoyed cooking together, and both kids have been involved in the restaurant business," Barb Farnsworth said.

Her Soup Kitchen opened in October 2009, and since its debut on Iowa City's restaurant scene, she has made sure the deli has followed a concept that has always been important to her — recycling and reducing waste.

At the end of each day, she takes out exactly one bag of trash — everything else is recycled. Outside of her business, Farnsworth is also active in several of Iowa City's recycling programs, including Rummage in the Ramp, in which residents can donate old furniture that would have otherwise been thrown out.

Jennifer Jordan, the recycling coordinator for Iowa City, was seen firsthand Farnsworth's active involvement in being eco-friendly.

Along with helping with the city's recycling information brochure, Jordan said Farnsworth is environmentally savvy with her family business.

"With Her Soup Kitchen, she persuaded her vendors



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Barb Farnsworth shows the menu board on the exterior of Her Soup Kitchen on Monday. The restaurant changes its menu daily depending on what foods are available.

to reuse the boxes they bring in, and the vendors take them back with them," Jordan said. "She's very forward thinking in that way."

Farnsworth also stressed the importance of having a personal connection with everyone who comes into Her Soup Kitchen. The open and inviting space is adorned with artwork and filled with mismatched tables and chairs, all of which were donated by customers. Farnsworth will even take recipe ideas from her loyal patrons.

"They'll say, 'Have you tried this?' or 'This sandwich would be great if you added this,'" she said. "My collection of recipes are things that people have either faxed me or e-mailed me."

She believes that a com-

fortable, family-friendly environment is incredibly important. She likes to tell the story of a granddaughter who brought her grandmother in for the first time because the aroma of Her Soup Kitchen was exactly like her grandmother's house at Thanksgiving.

Farnsworth is quick to give credit to the rest of her family for Her Soup Kitchen's success, but the importance of her warm attitude just can't be denied.

"I guess I'm the 'her' of Her Soup Kitchen," she said, smiling.

Dick Farnsworth certainly agrees.

"She's the money and the brains behind this thing," he said. "I'm just the guy who helps out."

Barb Farnsworth

- **Age:** 57
- **Hometown:** Iowa City
- **Favorite food:** Crawfish
- **Favorite movie:** *The Wizard of Oz*
- **Ideal Saturday Night:** Reading cooking magazines and sipping a glass of wine
- **Best part of living in Iowa City:** It's a large enough town but still has a small-town feel.
- **Favorite athlete:** NASCAR driver Mark Martin

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