

RESTAURANT: New cafe going for greenest in California

CLAIRE'S ON CEDROS STRIVES FOR LEED PLATINUM CERTIFICATION

CHRIS CHAN - For the North County Times | Posted: Friday, August 7, 2009



Samantha and Bobby Ghiselli, with their one-year-old son, Gianni, prepare to order during the opening event at Claire's On Cedros bakery and cafe earlier this month. The owners of the restaurant are hoping their business will become the first eatery in California to attain a LEED Platinum Certification. (Jamie Scott Lytle -- Staff photographer)

Claire's on Cedros is trying to become the first restaurant in California to attain a LEED Platinum certification, the highest possible designation of energy-efficient construction and design given by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Owners Claire Allison and Terri Boley admit they didn't plan to apply for the certification.

Architect Jean-Louis Coquereau led them down the green path, using a variety of environmentally friendly design features. The

cafe's floors are made with recycled glass and porcelain. Its giant double doors were reused from Vandenberg Air Force Base.

An abundance of windows reduce the need for indoor lighting and cooling. The porous concrete parking lot reduces water runoff. These and numerous other features already positioned the building to receive extremely high "green building" ratings.

Becoming eligible for LEED Platinum has added substantially to costs.

"The solar panels were more expensive, costing about \$100,000. But those costs will be recovered in energy savings in five years," Boley said.

Solar energy fulfills 36 percent of the cafe's energy needs. An upgraded heating and cooling system cost them an additional \$30,000. But the added expense represented only a fraction of the \$3.5 million used to purchase the land and build the structure. Coquereau plans to apply for certification in September. If granted, Claire's would be the first LEED Platinum restaurant in California, according to the architect's research.

While environmental friendliness doesn't necessarily ensure an eatery's survival, the owners bring restaurant and business experience to the project. Boley is what some would call a serial entrepreneur. An electrical engineer by training, she has started and sold several other businesses in the past. Her most recent was a horse ranch.

Allison has had experience in commercial baking, most notably at Milton's where she developed the recipe for its popular loaf bread, now sold worldwide. She also brings a team of trusted staff to cook and bake pastries from scratch.

"It's so nice to have people behind you that are going to watch your back and they trust you to lead them," said Allison.

The owners attribute the successful Aug. 1 opening of the cafe largely to their incidental marketing.

When Claire's on Cedros received initial approval from the city to operate, they were only allowed to serve meals free of charge for training purposes. Friends and family were the initial customers.

When neighbors saw people in the cafe, they inquired. Soon local residents were signing up for the pre-opening service dubbed "free food week."

Word of the new establishment spread in the community, and the owners found that a majority of initial customers were nearby residents.

Still, Boley and Allison are cautious about their early success. Their decision to purchase the land and the building was a backstop for their investment.

"We know restaurants have a very high rate of failure, so at least we can rent it out" said Claire Allison.

And the two have already warned their families there would be no family vacations anytime soon.

Allison is digging in.

"It's going to be seven days a week for the next year," she said.