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Steve Cardinalli, Chef
The Cottage Restaurant

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It's a funny thing, the restaurant business. You can spend your whole life in it and then suddenly you're an overnight success. Or at least it seems that way, sometimes. “It was funny how it happened,” observes co-owner, chef and self-described “chief-cook-and-bottle-washer” of The Cottage Restaurant, Steve Cardinalli.

“Back last year, a lady came in and said that we'd been suggested for a recommendation in the Mobil Restaurant Guide. We showed her around, she looked through the kitchen, and then we didn't hear anything. Until three days ago,” he smiles, “when she came around again and said, ‘Congratulations! You're in the book.’”

And it's not just the nationals who have taken notice of the Cardinalli's soups, *Coast Weekly* readers recently selected The Cottage to receive the ‘Best Soup’ award.

The Cottage Restaurant

Lincoln between Ocean and 7th avenues,
Carmel, 625-6260

Hours: Breakfast 7:30am-3pm, lunch
11am-3pm, Monday-Saturday, Sunday
7:30am-2pm. Dinner Thursday, Friday and
Saturday evenings, 5-9pm.

Price range: \$1.25 to 14.95

“We have customers that come in every Monday, because they know the special is our chicken stew, served in a bread basket,” Steve explains. “And we have people that come in just for our artichoke soup, that they can have with a Caesar salad or half sandwich. We make it fresh every day, which means three of us, back in the kitchen, painstakingly scraping every artichoke leaf!” Obviously, all that scraping hasn't gone unnoticed.

But, there's also the every day kind of reward that all the members of this family-run business are quick to point out—the kind that comes from the continued presence of a loyal following, many of whom were regulars at a previous restaurant venue. “I had The Left Bank for 11 years,” explains Kathleen, in partnership now with son Steve and his wife, Nellie. “It was over in the Carmel Plaza and we were known for our specialty crepes—a few of them are on our menu now. And we still see some of the same faces—we had two couples in the other day who asked me if I remembered them from our other place 15 years ago, when they were just kids!”

While the selection of both savory and sweet crepes have established their own enduring claim to fame (the huge, cottage-

shaped fruit and ice cream dessert crepes are a formidable example), the menu goes far and wide in all sorts of other offerings. From breakfast muffins and pancake batter to pizza dough (with six innovative pizzas to choose from), as well as all the salad dressings and sauces, “We do it all right here,” they emphasize. Along with the regular dinner menu that hits all the bases—filet mignon, chicken marsala, swordfish with papaya salsa—the list of nightly specials makes for some tough decision-making, especially when there's teriyaki salmon and the sell-out Cottage lasagna to choose from.

And considering that it's a kitchen unfamiliar with any convenience to be found within a can or jar, it's a good thing that there are plenty of capable hands on deck. “We've been blessed that when we opened, we were able to keep almost all the staff from when it was Katy's Cottage, as well as the customers. Some of the crew has been here almost since the place first opened,” says Steve. “We brought Ron Plants in when we started doing dinners two years ago, and along with myself and Alejo Vasquez, we're all chefs and do all the cooking. I knew from the beginning that I didn't want to create a hierarchy, but I did want a kitchen where everyone is cross-trained and can jump in to any position and do the job—and it worked for us.”

As well as for their customers, who vote with their feet, and ballots, too.