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THE EATBEAT: Mashed potatoes, gravy go over well at Kitty's Cafe

For two years in a row, Kitty Stromberg has been faced with running a restaurant where people come in and out of town by boat during end-of-spring flooding.

By: [Marilyn Hagerty](#), Grand Forks Herald

OSLO, Minn. — People have to eat whether or not their town is surrounded by water. For two years in a row, Kitty Stromberg has been faced with running a restaurant where people come in and out of town by boat during end-of-spring flooding.

Kitty laughs about it now. The 2010 flood is over. This year, only nine days did she have to sleep in makeshift surroundings. A year ago, right after she took over the cafe, she was marooned in Oslo for 16 nights with only a mattress to sleep on.

Kitty lives in Argyle, Minn., and commutes to work. She was asked to run the restaurant in this town of 274 by businessmen who want to be sure there is a place to eat.

So far, things have gone well. Kitty knows how to serve meat and potatoes. She does an especially good job of making potato salad. And she has kitchen help who know how to bake. She calls Krista Marciniak a "lifesaver."

The coffee is always hot and ready. People serve themselves and take a seat at the counter or in one of the booths. Some go into the side room, where there's a big fireplace, tables and chairs. Kitty and her staff that includes two dependable waitresses — Jean Corradi and Shannon Bakken — keep folks happy.

The midday special was a pork chop dinner (\$6.95) when I dropped in recently with a friend, Sue Huus (SH).

We sat in a booth near the counter and looked over the menu. I ordered a cup of ham and bean soup and a hamburger. SH had a BLT sandwich with macaroni salad.

The soup was great — nice and hot. The serving of macaroni salad was ample. My burger was for real, although I would have liked it better if the bun was toasted.

We took home some potato salad, made with red spuds that stay nice and firm and a nice sharp-tasting dressing.

When the lunch rush slowed, we visited with Kitty, who's been working in restaurants since she was in high school — first in Kennedy, Minn., then in Argyle.

But she finds it is far different running a restaurant than just being an employee. Before, she would just forget about work when she got through with a shift. Now, she must think of the cost-and- profit margin, a challenge that keeps her hopping.

She feels good about business. In the morning, one group of men comes in early. Later, another group from Dahlstrom's car dealership shows up. They all have coffee. Some have pastries. They shake dice to see who pays. If someone is getting a car serviced at the dealership and has to wait, it is a good omen for Kitty. The customers get a coupon for a meal at the cafe.

The place is the heartbeat of the town. A bulletin board has notices and messages to let people know what's going on. The news of the day is exchanged over coffee. Daily specials with mashed potatoes and gravy go over well. For people in a hurry, the cafe handles takeouts.

Kitty's is rather plain but inviting. The counter has five comfortable seats with backs. Walls are light, and windows to the street large. Carpeting is dark green with a pattern. The side room is comfortable.

Reach Oslo by going north on Interstate 29 about 16 miles and then east on state Highway 54. Or take state Highway 220 north of East Grand Forks until you hit Highway 1. It's an easy and worthwhile drive.

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