

✓ UCSC video makers cook up a blue plate special

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER
Sentinel Staff Writer

ALL the old-timers were at the Delmarette Wednesday afternoon to celebrate the diner's 50th anniversary. Too bad the guest of honor had a prior engagement.

Phyllis Ratzman, who bought the former drugstore and turned it into a luncheonette in 1937, died nine years ago at age 59. But her spirit was very much the topic of conversation among diners who showed up to see a videotape entitled "Blue Plate Special: the Story of a Diner."

UCSC students Gretchen Hackett and Eva Brzeski made the film as a project for their independent studies major. They run an independent production company called 'Mel and Alice productions.

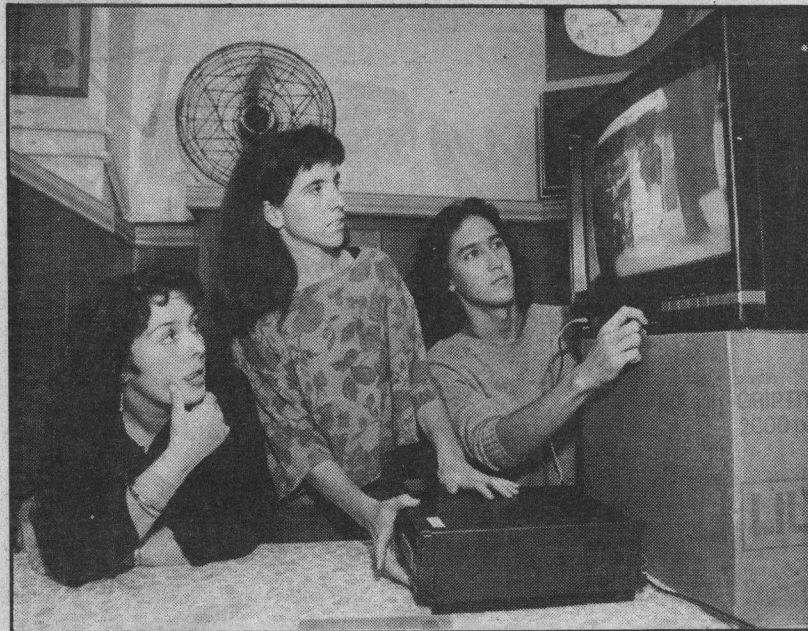
The film chronicles the history of the diner using old photographs and commentary from some of the diner's regular customers, some who have been eating there since it opened on Pacific Avenue.

But mostly, the film is about Phyll — as Ratzman was known — the fun-loving gal who used to make hamburgers without the meat and put plastic bugs in salads as pranks.

A dozen Delmarette customers watched their buddies recount anecdotes. They hooted at old pictures of the regulars, shown bushy of crown and slim of waist.

They laughed at clips of commercials shown at intermission at the Del Mar Theater next door (touting the diners' "pleasing service and moderate prices").

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Eva Brzeski, Getchen Hackett and David Yu adjust Delmarette video.



The late Phyllis Ratzman with waitress, Betty, in early Delmarette days.

Delmarette

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Other than that, the half-century celebration was pretty low-key.

Florist David Ferrari, a close friend of Ratzman's, recounted the time Ratzman served a customer a hamburger with no meat, as a joke. "She told a few of us what was going on. We could hardly keep a straight face. The guy ate it, thanked her, paid the bill and left."

Another guy used to complain his burgers were never rare enough, so she left the meat out of his sandwich, too. He reportedly told Ratzman it was the best burger he'd ever eaten.

The metal pot on a wall above the door was the stuff of other revelry. If Ratzman didn't like a customer's attitude, she'd throw his change up in the basket. When it got full, "we'd have a party," said Ferrari.

Millie Miller, a waitress for 16 years, demonstrates the art of malt making in the videotape.

Miller said the regulars start lining up at the counter at 7 a.m. — an hour before it opens — to sip coffee and swap gossip.

She's been making malts ("one scoop of vanilla and two scoops of chocolate") for 16 years, and plans to continue working there "til they carry me out."

For now, however, she's recuperating from hip surgery. She won't be back at the grill till September.

If there's one point the dozen cus-

tomers agreed on Wednesday afternoon, it's that the luncheonette hasn't changed much over the years. The pinball machines and cigarette racks are gone. The knotty pine is covered with paint. But the Bulova clock on the wall, the Hamilton Beach equipment, the menu — complete with Ratzman's Ka-de-de, Ka-Da-Da, and Ka-Diddle-Hopper sandwiches — remain the same as they were 50 years ago.

No one present could explain why Ratzman named the sandwiches as she did. "She may have been a fan of Red Skelton," offered Jim Dugger, who took over the diner in 1978. "Clem Kadiddlehopper was one of his characters."

The diner used to stay open till midnight, for the theater crowd, Dugger recalled. "Phyll would stay open from 7 a.m. to midnight — can you imagine that?"

During the war, soldiers would play swing music on the juke box and dance on the counters.

The customers haven't changed much, either.

Santa Cruz native Diane Watson has been coming to the Delmarette since 1945. "I used to get a milkshake to go with the 25-cent movies next door," she said.

"I come here every day to catch up on the local gossip — or contribute some of my own."

The 21-seat Delmarette is the last

diner on Pacific Garden Mall. It caters to a strictly local crowd, closing in the afternoon and on Sundays.

"It's just an old-time diner that

won't quit," says Dugger.

And you can still get the blue plate special: hot dog or a patty with choice of salad. Small or large.



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Delmarette old-timers gather for video presentation. From left, Pauline Baldwin who is Phyllis Ratzman's sister, Helen Rodriguez, Bob Hughes, Kathy Miller and Millie Miller.