

Spotlight On Foster's & Hwy 12 Diner

By Laurie Oleksiewicz Photos by Jan Vick

A unique business can be found on the very highway that runs through Rio Vista, the Hwy 12 Diner. The diner is owned and operated by a well-respected Rio Vista couple, Howard and Mary Ellen Lamothe.

Howard is a fourth generation Rio Vistan. After two years as a submarine sailor during the Vietnam War and with a degree from Chico State University, Howard returned to Rio Vista to raise his family. In 2000, Howard bought Foster's Bighorn, a well-known dining establishment on Main Street in downtown Rio Vista.

Mary Ellen grew up in San Luis Obispo, working in a family-owned restaurant. After graduating from San Jose State, she taught high school for 12 years, with cooking and culinary arts her specialty. A move to Napa Valley put Mary Ellen in touch with fine wines and foods. She owned a wine brokerage and worked as a wine educator at several wineries. In 2005 Mary Ellen moved to Rio Vista when she married Howard Lamothe.

Howard operated Henry's Coffee Shop, a prior name of the Hwy 12 Diner for 22 years. In 2007, he sold the restaurant and it was operated by other owners for several years. In 2015 the restaurant was closed until Howard and Mary Ellen opened it in 2016 under the name Hwy 12 Diner. It opened in January 2016 after a hectic six week restaurant make-over that involved all new equipment and a fresh updated look.

Both Howard and Mary Ellen have excellent backgrounds and experience in the food industry field, which helps make the Hwy 12 Diner a top notch eatery here in Rio Vista. Whether you are just passing through on highway 12 or are local folks, you will appreciate the diner's top quality food at affordable prices.

As Mary Ellen stated, "We love cooking and we love to eat, so buying top quality ingredients is paramount. We make our own meatloaf and corned beef hash; our chili is a favorite and won 2nd place at the Hog August Bites event last year. People love being able to order breakfast all day long and our omelets are a favorite."

When they opened the Hwy 12 Diner, Howard and Mary Ellen knew they wanted a great coffee. After tasting their way through several coffee roasters in Sacramento, they selected Old Soul Coffee. The Hwy 12 Diner is supplied weekly with fresh roasted coffee beans sourced from Central and South America and Asia. In January 2017 they added an espresso bar, offering a full selection of espresso based drinks, latte, mocha, and iced drinks.

When asked what they like best about their work and business, Mary Ellen answers "the people." Their employees are dedicated individuals who care about the business and each other. One of their employees is Trixy Malone who started working there when it was Henry's Coffee Shop. At that time Trixy was in high school and both her mother and grandmother worked there too. Now

Trixy is the manager and primary cook. Her efforts help to keep the business running smoothly and happily.

And of course the other "people" Howard and Mary Ellen treasure are the customers. "The patrons become friends and it is like another family here at the diner. Everyone likes to cook, to eat, and to socialize, so this is the perfect place!" states Mary Ellen.

So next time you are passing by, whether on your way to another destination, or on your way to run errands downtown, be sure to stop by the Hwy 12 Diner or Foster's Bighorn to enjoy a good meal and a good time.



Foster's Bighorn



Hwy 12 Diner