Granny’s Restaurant: 21st century Americana

By Lowell L. Getz

When we think of an “Americana” restaurant, the image that usually comes to mind is that of a quaint cozy cafe, in an old building dating back to the 1800s, operated by an elderly woman whose family has run the place for decades. This is not always the case.

Every so often we encounter an Americana diner that is of 21st century vintage. One such eatery is Granny’s Restaurant, in the little town of Chesterfield, population 223, located on Illinois Route 111, 50 miles south of Springfield.

In April 2006, Sam Huff attached a 16-by-24 foot addition to the back of a small convenience grocery store, Granny’s Grocery Store, built two years earlier on the site of the former Mobil service station, alongside Route 111, on the south side of the town square. There was room for only 24 customers.

The table tops were plain formica, with plastic coated menus serving as place mats. The walls were varnished OSB chip board, with a few simple rustic decorations. The kitchen was open to the seating area, in full view of the diners.

Granny’s Restaurant is open from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday through Thursday for breakfast and lunch and from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Friday to include dinner. The cooks, Cheryl Huff, Sam’s wife, and Paula Robbins, have put together an extensive menu for such a small restaurant, including 20 breakfast choices and 37 lunch items. On Friday night there are three main entrees, in addition to the lunch menu items and an all-you-can-eat fried river fish special.

Granny’s Restaurant rapidly became the social center for the community. Meeting family and friends at Granny’s has become a ritual for a number of people in the area.

Some of the farmers bring their workers, often 20 or more at a time, to Granny’s for lunch. Most of the tables are filled for breakfast and lunch. And those wanting to eat at Granny’s on Friday nights usually need to arrive before 5 p.m. to find an open table.

In March, so as to accommodate more patrons, Sam Huff made a major change in the configuration and image of Granny’s Restaurant.

He moved the grocery shelves into the restaurant space, and the dining tables, now covered with tablecloths, into the larger convenience store space, where he can seat at least 46 diners.

The cinder block walls of the new dining area are painted bright yellow and white, with few adornments, thus retaining an unpretentious decor.

Whereas the original Granny’s Restaurant offered a cozy subdued atmosphere, the new Granny’s imparts a fresh, cheerful setting. The simple decor enhances the Americana ambiance.

It is rare to find such a successful restaurant in a town as small as Chesterfield. This is testimony to the perception of Sam Huff for what works.