

Whately Diner feeling the pinch

Reduces workers' hours to deal with higher costs, fewer customers

By **BEN STORROW**
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WHATELY — A deteriorating economic climate has forced the Whately Diner to reduce the hours of its employees, the result of rising costs and fewer customers, according to restaurant management.

The diner hoped a reduction of employee hours would avert layoffs.

The Whately eatery, which lies just off Exit 24 from Interstate 91, employs nearly 30 people and has long been a favorite among locals, college students and truckers who enjoy its around-the-clock service. Yet it has seen a reduction in customers in recent months, a development that prompted the move to limit employee hours.

"Who we've lost is local people," said restaurant manager Fred Brown, who speculated that fewer people are going out to eat because of the recession.

"The Diner," as it is commonly known in the region, has been burdened with increasing food and labor costs, Brown said. He noted that the reductions were part of a larger effort to conserve resources in any way possible. Jason McKelvey, a cook, said his hours were reduced by eight hours a week.

He said he knows of others on the staff who have had their hours pared

back more. McKelvey lamented that the reduction has forced him to be on the lookout for other part-time employment to help cover his bills, but noted that few jobs were available in the restaurant industry.

"It's tough times right now. People are getting cut or fired and those who are still working are being asked to do more with less," McKelvey said of the industry.

For her part, longtime employee Jacqueline LeDoyt remained optimistic the restaurant would pull through the economic hard times. She said the eatery has survived ups and downs since she began working there in 1982 and that it often witnessed a lull in business during winter.

"Everyone here works together," she said. "I feel like all the girls have become closer because of the whole thing."

LeDoyt said she hated to contemplate losing the diner.

"I've been here so long, it's part of my life," she said. "I love it here. I don't want things to change."

Brown said that the restaurant was considering a change of menu, a decision he hoped would help reduce food costs. He plans to eliminate items on the menu that aren't selling well and replace them with different dishes. By Brown's account, the restaurant has not changed its menu in more than a year.

LeDoyt was positive about the diner's prospects.

"I think things will get better," she said.





Whately Diner waitress Mia Holland of Shelburne takes an order on Friday afternoon.

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