



The lure of gold brought the first settlers to Sonora, Calif., some 160 years ago. The town became a commercial, government and cultural center for the region as the California Gold Rush gained momentum. But it was a bumpy start, says Pat Perry, city historian.

“Like so many Gold Rush towns,” Perry notes, “Sonora had a wild reputation in its early days. According to Frank Marryat, who wrote about his 1851 experiences in Sonora, ‘No church bells here usher in the Sabbath ... every man carries arms, generally a Colt revolver, buckled behind, with no attempt at concealment.’ ”

The gold eventually gave out, but the town survived. Today, visitors to Sonora are attracted to its vintage Western setting and the wide-open spaces of nearby Yosemite National Park. And though it doesn’t sound a bell to announce Sunday services, Christian Heights Church, a local Assemblies of God congregation, is one of a growing number of houses of worship intent on enriching local life.



SECOND CUP

Heart Rock Café offers cream, sugar ...

and the gospel

By Scott Harrup

Heart Rock Café has a key location on Sonora’s town square (top) offers a free meal every week (middle) and holds café church every Sunday (bottom).

SECOND CUP

Christian Heights' presence isn't limited to the church building on 13711 Joshua Way.

Grab a cup of coffee at Heart Rock Café in the heart of Sonora (pop. 4,596), and you'll mingle with a cross-section of America. City and county workers make the full-menu coffeehouse their lunch diner of choice. Treated with just as much respect are homeless clients who come for a free dinner on Wednesday night or the free lunch on Sunday.

Join patrons at the café on just about any night of the week and you'll discover one of the most popular community centers in rural Tuolumne County.

The café building includes an adjoining theater/auditorium. One night finds a crowd cheering on contestants for "Sonora's Got Talent." Other groups gather for a Bible study or widows' support. The Court Reporters Association uses the auditorium because it's conveniently located across from the courthouse. And Friday nights highlight a family activity — Christian karaoke night, Family Movie Night, Nintendo Wii Challenge and Christian concerts of every variety from bluegrass to rock.

For Pastor Craig Andrus and the families of Christian Heights, Heart Rock Café is not so much

an extension of the church as an invitation for those outside the church to experience Jesus Christ in everyday living. That's why, even though the community newspaper once expressed doubt when "a church bought the premier retail location in the city," Andrus notes, *The Union Democrat* celebrated the café's 10-year anniversary this spring with a full feature.

"Tourists come to Sonora from all over the world to visit Yosemite," Andrus says, "and they ask us why our café is successful. Coffeehouses come and go. Our answer is, from the very beginning the Lord directed us to aim our coffeehouse at the unchurched. We did not build our coffeehouse to attract Christians. We built it to be a Christian influence in our city."

A decade ago, Andrus and a group from Christian Heights held an informal summer night's service in the town park. That's when Andrus says God gave him the idea for the café.

"I looked across the park at this empty café building," he remembers. "I felt like God spoke to me and said He'd give us that building if we'd use it to help others."

The building stood empty because a developer had skipped town with investors' money. An-

drus and church leaders presented their proposal for a community center to the congregation. Because the developer had been imprisoned, the investors had an empty building on their hands. So church leaders found a receptive ear to their offer of \$250,000.

But even as Christian Heights raised funds for the café's down payment and furnishings, another need arose. A rescue mission in San Francisco was about to forfeit its building. Christian Heights gave \$5,000 to help meet that need, even though that meant donating all the money that had been raised toward the café at that point. The mission

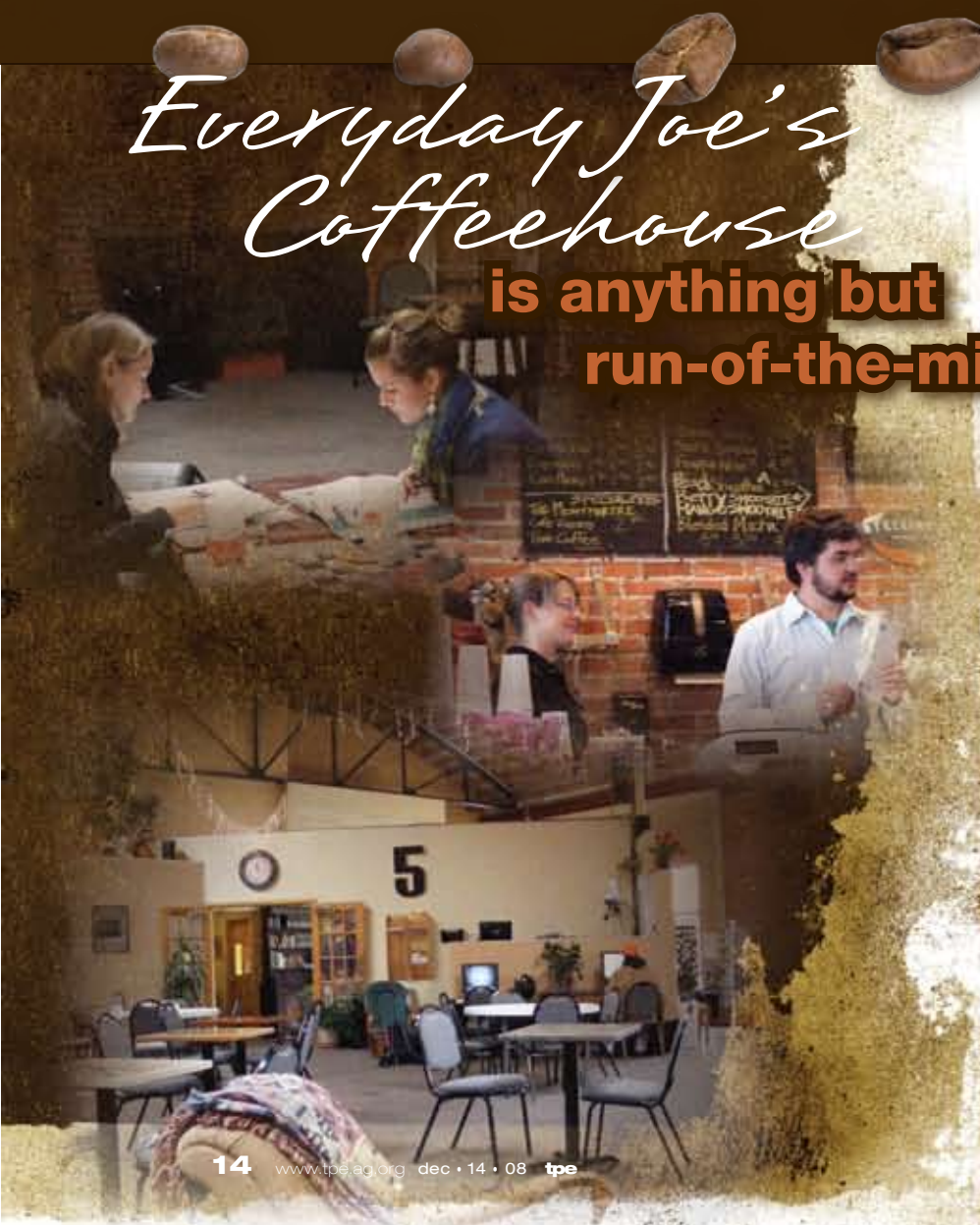
managed to purchase the building in San Francisco. Just two months later, Christian Heights had raised nearly \$90,000. Additional gifts have since paid off Heart Rock Café.

Still, Andrus says, the café doesn't make a profit. It breaks even most months, and occasionally requires church funding to make up a shortfall. And that's the way Christian Heights wants it.

"We never wanted Heart Rock to be a big moneymaking proposition," Andrus says. "That is not why we opened it. We opened it

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Everyday Joe's Coffeehouse is anything but run-of-the-mill



Timberline Old Town Church in Fort Collins, Colo., is open seven days a week. But only on Sundays are church services held. The other six days the church operates as a nonprofit coffeehouse called Everyday Joe's.

"The coffeehouse is an outreach of the church," explains Darren Fred, 43, pastor of the church and one of about 30 volunteer baristas. "It exists to be an intersection where people of faith and people of no faith can meet."

Like many coffeehouses, Everyday Joe's doesn't just sell coffee; it offers customers an experience. Inside the former service station restrained chatter, the dull clinking of mugs, music and — of course — the aroma of coffee fill the air.

Like beautiful pendants, art from local artists hangs on the brick walls. There's also an event board brimming with flyers advertising everything from bikes for sale to lectures at the university. Behind the counter volunteer baristas busily go about their chores serving up espressos, grande cups of coffee and even a drink called "The

Gorilla" — steamed milk, espresso, banana and chocolate.

The underlying goal of such a place, says Fred, is to put the love of Christ into action by serving the community.

It seems to work.

On a recent Sunday, Jenny Mann explains how her visits to Everyday Joe's played a part in transforming her view of God, the church and followers of Christ.

"I didn't grow up going to church," says Mann, 28. "But while I was pursuing a master's degree at CSU [Colorado State University] I got to know one of the baristas here who happened to be the pastor.

"I was never a person who had a community I belonged to, but church became a family outside of my family," she continues. "It's nice to go somewhere each week where people stop and say hi and ask how things are going in your world."

The same thing happened for Danny Wilson, a student at CSU.

"I came through those doors as an outspoken atheist four years ago," he says, pointing toward the entrance.

"Now I'm leading worship."

Fred says the church — a satellite of nearby Timberline Church (pastored by Dary Northrop) — was initially led by a pastor who had a couple of things in mind.

"He wanted it to look like an art gallery, sound like a rock concert, feel like an opera and smell like a coffeehouse," he says.

Mann likes the vibe and says it draws unchurched people.

"It's not as harsh here," says Mann, who admits that she once vowed never to become a follower of Christ. "This is a great way for people to get to know the church without a lot of judgment."

As Fred speaks to his congregation he keeps the tone conversational. At one point he admits he doesn't have everything about God and faith figured out. As he grapples with his questions he elicits input from the crowd.

"It's been a dream of mine to have a dialog-driven church," he says after the service. "Church should be a place where people feel safe asking tough questions."

A quick look at the congregation reveals an eclectic bunch. There

are cowboys, college students with bedhead, former homeless people and young couples who look as if they just stepped out of an L.L. Bean catalog.

Many came initially for the coffee, free Wi-Fi and Friday night concerts only to stumble unexpectedly onto something much greater.

"The power of this place is that it puts people in a room together that normally wouldn't be in a room together," says Fred.

But doing so, he admits, has posed some interesting challenges.

One day, as Fred wrote his Sunday sermon, he noticed that a nearby patron was a transgender person. At first Fred felt conflicted, but then he had an epiphany.

"That's when the power of this intersection we created exploded in my mind," he says. "Yes, the transgender person, the gay hairdresser and unchurched college kids who come in every day know who we are. In time we're able to build trust, and eventually people open up to the gospel."

And that's reason enough to serve more coffee. **tpe**

— Kirk Noonan



Ebenezers serves more than coffee

Coffee with a cause. That's the mind-set behind the ministry of the staff of Ebenezers Coffeehouse in Washington, D.C. The idea behind this new-wave outreach is to create a way for believers and nonbelievers to connect in a nontraditional setting.

Ebenezers is a natural gathering place for hundreds of people in search of a good cup of coffee. But there's a catch.

"We not only serve coffee, we serve Christ," says Mark Batterson, lead pastor of National Community Church (NCC), which owns and operates the coffeehouse. "We have to reach out to what might be uncharted territory."

Located just five blocks from the nation's capitol, Ebenezers is a three-level coffeehouse designed to bring in D.C.'s 30-and-under crowd. The middle level dining area is on par with any Starbucks. The lower level features a miniauditorium where bands regularly perform.

Beyond the ambience, regulars come for a variety of the city's best coffee, as chosen by AOL CityGuides for 2008.

Ebenezers creates an unseen ministry framework that goes something like this: sit, drink, experience and enjoy. Conversations about life and faith are as likely to ensue as ones about politics. Patrons are informally invited to weekly functions. Outreach is a constant focus but also nonthreatening and low key, whether it's "Alpha" Bible study for borderline or new believers on Monday night, "Poet-a-Tete — Open Mic Poetry" on Thursdays, or the two Saturday night church services.

Each event aims to reach unchurched and dechurched young people as their generation emerges. According to Christian researcher George Barna, 61 percent of under-30 Americans who grew up attending church discontinued going to a place of worship at some period during their 20s. Ebenezers attempts to lessen that statistic. According to Batterson, 70 percent of their weekly gatherings consist of people who are under 30 years old.

The coffeehouse sits near two prominent universities, Georgetown and George Washington University. The campuses represent 32,000 prospective customers — many of whom need Christ.

Batterson and company are socially minded too. Ebenezers' profits go toward missions. The earnings have contributed to Convoy of Hope functions in the D.C. community, along with other missions events.

Batterson points out Jesus didn't just hang out at the synagogue; He spent time at the water wells with the common folk. And that, he says, is the crux of what Ebenezers' ministry is all about.

"Going outside our normal religious realm," he adds, "being a blessing and an asset to the community." **tpe**

— Derek Guilford

SECOND CUP

to be a presence in our downtown community."

Chrystal Lamar, one of six on staff at the café, is adept at creating an inviting presence for clients who see the café as an oasis in the midst of a troubling day. She recognizes pain on a customer's face because so much of her life has been marked by addiction and hopelessness.

"I was a drug addict all my life," Lamar says. "I've been strung out on heroin and everything else you can think of — mostly meth for over 40 years. I knew about God, but I wasn't walking with Him. I'd been through programs, but I turned it over to the Lord two years ago. Heart Rock was the only place that would give me a chance and give me a job."



Chrystal Lamar

Lamar makes everyone feel welcome at Heart Rock, from the well-dressed city employee to the homeless wanderer who discovers the café's open door.

"All of us who work here, if somebody wants to talk we'll take the time to talk with them and pray with them," she says. "There have been so many people I've seen changed since I've been here."

Heart Rock's church connection is clearest on Sunday when families gather for Café Church. It's standing room only, informal, with free doughnuts and coffee mingling with music and shared prayer before Andrus' sermon comes online live on a big-screen monitor. It concludes with a free lunch for all.

That ministry model is now expanding to two additional satellite churches in nearby Tuolumne and Jamestown. Andrus is helping organizers in those locations set up a drop-in center where people can come in from the cold, have access to showers and even find protective housing in the event of family violence.

The possibilities are as limitless as Sonora's varied needs, Andrus believes. And if it starts with a cup of coffee, that's not too removed from the simple gift of a cup of cold water Jesus once praised.

For Lamar, each day working at Heart Rock blesses her as much as any client.

"My life is so overwhelmingly wonderful now that it scares me," she says. "I cannot believe this is my life now. Because a couple years ago it was totally different. God has given me so much. My heart is in Heart Rock. I feel like I'm coming to church every day. This is where I live. This is what I do. I want to serve God." **tpe**

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