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Lafayette, Millie's Kitchen will miss its founder as Millie Harris dies at 91

By Cathy Dausman



Millie's Kitchen, a Lafayette fixture. Photo Andy Scheck

The old-fashioned street sign on Oak Hill Road reads "Millie's Kitchen." The sign was designed and contributed by a San Francisco policeman who was a restaurant patron. While the sign and the name remain, Millie Harris, original chef and owner of Millie's Kitchen in Lafayette, died Jan. 29 at age 91.

Harris opened the kitchen in June 1975, said current owner Eva Clement. Clement worked at the restaurant for 14 years, telling Harris, "When you're ready to sell, I'll buy." In 1989 Harris told Clement "I'm ready," and retired to Gualala, California, where she had property. She continued working, this time as a volunteer for the local food bank.

"She made sure that there were candy canes, cracker jacks, cookies, and something sweet for the children in every food bank distribution," wrote Paul Batchelder on a Lafayette Facebook page.

If children were important to Harris, she and her restaurant were equally important to Lamorinda residents. Sue Callister of Lafayette started eating at Millie's in high school, and continued to patronize the restaurant later in life, often biking there to eat with her children. Callister called Harris "a wonderful lady" and thinks Harris was once a VIP at a Campolindo High School's homecoming parade. She's seen Millie's Kitchen coffee mugs as far away as Perth, Australia, where a former East Bay resident relocated.

Lamorinda resident Nancy Mooers Brown has eaten at Millie's since high school. "I've enjoyed introducing my husband and our kids to Millie's," Brown said. She says her children also consider the restaurant their favorite Lafayette breakfast spot. "My go-to favorite has always been Millie's coffee cake," she said.

Lafayette Chamber of Commerce executive director Jay Lifson has been a regular at Millie's for 30 years. "During the Art & Wine Festival we have our pre-event meetings at 5 a.m. there each year," he said.

Graveside services are open to the public; they will be held at 12 p.m. Feb. 8 at Queen of Heaven Cemetery, 1965 Reliez Valley Road in Lafayette. At Harris' request there will be no funeral. As she told Clement, she wanted "no hoopla." She is survived by family in Wisconsin.

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