



Serving It Up: Mary Ellen's Place



By Alice Perrault
Graphic staff writer

Nancy Phillips is not your average waitress. She has a story to tell that may surprise some people. A few years ago, the Harbor Springs resident was put into a medically induced coma. She had a pancreatic infection and it became septic. Doctors had told her family she was not expected to survive. When she came out of her coma a month later, her family was told she would never work again. Now that she is better, Phillips is back to her first summer of work at her mother's restaurant, Mary Ellen's Place. She has been working there since she was 18 years old.

"I've always loved it here. I love the people and the food. Ever since I came out of the coma the relationships I've built with everyone have just been enhanced. I truly love my job," Phillips said.

During the time she was in the hospital, the community raised money to pay for her bills and to create a college fund for her children.

"I've never really had a chance to thank everyone. I want everyone to know how important they are to me and what all their help meant. It has really touched me to know that people care so much. Both this community and my family have been a blessing to me," Phillips said.

"I technically died three times. My heart kept stopping but they were able to save me each time. It's like I was meant to make it despite what the doctors said," she added.

Duties at Mary Ellen's Place involve everything from cooking and cleaning to taking orders and hiring staff.

"If you work here, you do a little bit of everything. It's more fun that way," Phillips said.

Her favorite thing on the menu at the restaurant is the Mary Ellen cheeseburger.

"You just can't find anything like it anywhere else," she said.

In her spare time, Phillips likes to be with her kids and go tubing. Her daughter Madison is 19. Her son, Jake, is 12.

"My daughter comes and sees me a lot and that's always tons of fun. I also have a lot of fun taking Jake to his little league games," she said.

In the future, Phillips says she plans on staying at Mary Ellen's Place, but she would like to look into foster care.

"It's something I've always had an interest in. I want to be able to help those kids," she said.

Starting June 11, Mary Ellen's Place will be open for dinner.

"The delicious food and friendly atmosphere make it a great place to come and eat," she said.

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Partly Cloudy, 63° F

Forecast:

Sun:  71° / 62°

Mon:  75° / 61°

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Cereal and waffles are overdone, not to mention I thought getting up early should mean a nice breakfast.

So, when I went to Mary Ellen's Place in Harbor Springs at 7 a.m. on a recent morning, I decided on something a bit out of the ordinary.

Sitting in the restaurant felt like being in a movie scene where everyone in town comes to the same place for breakfast. There are bar stools along the counter and booths lining the walls. Everyone seemed to know each other and it created a very homey and welcoming feeling.

Usually, when it comes to food I stick with what I know. I'd take peanut butter and jelly any day over some of those things you see judges eating on the Food Network channel. When I arrived at the restaurant, my first instinct was to order the usual eggs and bacon when something else caught my eye -- "Corned Beef Hash with Eggs and Toast."

I personally opted for scrambled eggs versus poached or sunny side up. When I cut into them, a bunch of steam rolled out and I knew they would be great. I was not disappointed either. The combination of the eggs and corned beef was excellent.

It may have been a big meal, but it was not a heavy one. I was stuffed for the rest of the afternoon. Add a glass of orange juice, and in my opinion, you have a \$8.86 breakfast worth getting up early for.

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