



# Hyde Park's Echo undergoes renaissance

By Amy Culbertson  
Post restaurant writer

New owner Stephanie Sykes wants to revive Hyde Park's once-beloved neighborhood restaurant, the Echo, with improved home-style cooking and a user-friendly attitude.

She's already expanded the Echo's hours, and she's in the process of upgrading the food, with a view toward attracting new customers and wooing back regulars who'd drifted away because of declining quality.

"I'm hoping to keep the basic theme of home cooking," she said, "really concentrating on the quality and freshness."

Ms. Sykes, who bought the restaurant in November, worked for a number of years as a manager at Pizzeria Uno on Beechmont Avenue.

She says she's already upgraded many of the Echo staples: the turkey, the meatloaf, the mashed potatoes (now real instead of instant). She's canned the canned chicken-noodle soup in favor of from-scratch soups and says even the barbecue sauce and tartar sauce are made from scratch.

She reassures concerned regulars that they'll still be able to get their fillet of sole on Friday: "I don't have big plans to change the name or change the theme."

"Some of the cooks who worked with the original owner, Louise Schwartz, are still here," Ms. Sykes said, "and we are pulling out some of the old recipes."

She's also working on some "healthier '90s home cooking" — lower-fat, lower-sodium dishes — to introduce in the future.



With new owner Stephanie Sykes (in sweater) are employees who have worked at the Echo more than 20 years. From left: Carolyn Hatfield, Marie Cipollone, Anna Cipollone, Maddalena Mozzone, Bonnie Ruggles, Ms. Sykes, Royal McKinney and Cathy Raines.

To make the Echo more user-friendly, Ms. Sykes has started opening on Sundays and now stays open until 9 instead of 7:45 in the evening. She'll start taking credit cards in a few weeks.

Two decades ago, the Echo could boast droves of regulars loyal to its reasonable prices and its dowdy, comforting neighborhood-restaurant fare such as open-faced turkey sandwiches, stewed tomatoes and apple pie.

A few doors from Hyde Park Square on Edwards Road, it was a haven for senior citizens in the neighborhood, and the staff knew most of them by name. At lunchtime, the lines would stretch down the sidewalk.

But, as the Echo changed hands and competition intensified, customers began to drift away as quality and value declined. Economies such as cutting the pies in sevenths instead

of sixths and charging for refills of coffee, Ms. Sykes said, "had eroded some of the customer base." She's gone back to the old way in both cases.

The pies are now made fresh every morning, she said — apple is a constant, plus a cream pie and another kind of fruit pie. Fridays bring lemon meringue and blackberry; Tuesdays may feature a lemon-raspberry number with whipped cream.

## Good eats

If a recent Saturday fried-chicken feast is any example, new owner Stephanie Sykes has not only restored the Echo's reputation for homey cooking but surpassed it.

The chicken pieces, even the white meat, were plump and juicy, not overcooked. And, if the crust didn't quite have that just-out-of-the-frying-pan crunch, it was still well-seasoned and reasonably crisp. This is important news in a city where real pan-fried chicken has become as scarce as (sorry, I can't resist) hen's teeth.

The Echo's cream gravy can't measure up to the Gravy of the Gods, which can be found at Wagner's Village Inn in Oldenburg, Ind., but then few gravies can. On the other hand, the Echo's mashed potatoes are real (Wagner's aren't), and that's something the Echo couldn't boast of two decades ago, when I remember standing in line to lunch there.

Finally, the Echo gets a gold star for its made-from-scratch cherry pie: nicely tart filling, not too heavy or gluey, with a flaky top crust. Captain Pie pronounces it "a credible pie."

— Amy Culbertson

Breakfast is available all day, she said, and Saturdays and Sundays bring chicken pan-fried in iron skillet and served with cream gravy (\$5.95 for all-dark, \$7.35 for all-white, \$6.35 mixed, with two side dishes).

*The Echo, 3510 Edwards Road, is open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday; closed Monday. No alcohol; separate dining room for smokers (321-2816).*

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