

Upfront

White marks the spot for Christmas lunch

By MICHELLE HOPKINS
mhopkins@richmond-news.com

Staff will work for free, give up tips to raise charity funds

This year marks the 10th anniversary of a special Christmas tradition at Richmond Centre's White Spot Restaurant.

While most of us are enjoying a day off to celebrate with family and friends, 53 employees at White Spot are donating their time and tips to charity.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Christmas Day, White Spot will be serving up all of its legendary dishes with every penny going to the Richmond Hospital Foundation and Variety — the Children's Charity.

Last year, \$8,888 was raised during a four-hour period. That includes all proceeds from every meal, tips and many generous donations from its loyal patrons, says restaurant manager Charlie Tsang.

"... the atmosphere is great and everyone is in a good mood."
— Stephanie Green

Veena Ganatra, adding her husband donates all of the food and drinks so that all money goes directly to the two charities. "It just made sense to him to give back."

Even though the mall is closed on Christmas Day, the restaurant is able to open because it has its own outdoor entrance.

"We took a vote that first year and asked if any of our employees wanted to volunteer in shifts of two hours, and everyone wanted to take part," she added.

Out of its 83 employees a resounding 53 have signed up this year.

The brain behind the fundraiser is franchisee owner, Prakash Ganatra and his wife Veena.

"The idea was my husband's ... his family is very much involved in charity work," said



CHUNG CHOW/RICHMOND NEWS

Ready to serve ... The staff at the White Spot restaurant at Richmond Centre on No. 3 Road will turn up for work Christmas Day and donate their time and tips for charity.

In fact, White Spot CEO and president Warren Erhart rolls up his sleeves every year and comes out for an hour or two to show his support.

"Last year, he was washing dishes," quipped Veena Ganatra.

Besides the employees, Ganatra's grown children and Tsang's children also come out to take part.

"Everyone is in the spirit and it's just a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas Day," added Tsang.

From its inception, Veena Ganatra said, employees enthusiastically came on board.

"That first year, we told the servers that tips were theirs to keep but no, they insisted on giving them back," she said.

For six years, 25-year-old server Stephanie Green has taken part in the Christmas Day luncheon.

"I love it, the atmosphere is great and everyone is in a good mood," Green said. "I like to stay for the whole time."

For 18-year-old Claudia Lau it just feels good to give back.

"This is my second year and even though it gets pretty hectic and busy, we all love

see *Diners* page 4

Diners: Line up out door

Continued from page 3

getting involved for such a good cause,” Lau said. “You see the customers having fun and knowing they are helping as well.”

The kitchen can get pretty hectic, said Robert Young, a 22-year-old University of B.C. student, White Spot Red Seal apprentice and part-time kitchen chef.

“My schedule is pretty busy but I can give a few hours on Christmas Day to volunteer,” said Young. “It’s festive and I feel like on a small scale I’m making a contribution.”

Raymond Amil, 28, knows all too well how busy it gets.

The chef has taken part in every single Christmas Day luncheon since its inception. (In 2007, the fundraiser didn’t happen because Prakash Ganatra was ill).

“I’m here for the whole day and everyone is working together for the cause,” said

the new father of a two-month-old son. “It’s busy but the kitchen crew has a great time.”

To understand how crazy busy it gets, normally there are between six to seven in the kitchen on any given shift — on Christmas Day there are 15.

Last year, the 169-seat restaurant accommodated four seatings over the four-hour fundraiser.

“We had line-ups out the door last year,” Tsang said. “The last of the guests left around 4 p.m. and a few of us stay to clean up until about 5:30 p.m.”

Richmond Centre’s White Spot will be open on Christmas Day from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. serving brunch and lunch with all proceeds going to charity. The restaurant is located at unit 1902-6551 No. 3 Rd.

For more information, call 604-278-3911.

“It’s busy, but the kitchen crew has a great time.”

— **Raymond Amil**