



## **Diners pay with donation at Panera cafe**

**If the Missouri model works out, the company's charitable foundation hopes to open hundreds of 'pay what you can' cafes.**

Posted by Karen Datko Tuesday, May 18, 2010

Ron Shaich, until recently the hugely successful CEO of Panera Bread, has launched a terrific social experiment. He's converted a Panera restaurant into a nonprofit where customers make donations rather than pay for their food.

The Saint Louis Bread Company Cares Café is just like a regular Panera store with two distinctions -- one major and one minor: The cashier lets you know what your meal would normally cost, and you put what you can into a donation box. The baked goods, except for the sandwich bread, are a day old.

So far, since the St. Louis area Panera location reopened as a nonprofit on Sunday, a third of the diners have donated more than they "owed," USA Today says. Those who can't pay are asked to donate time in the store.

- What's your time worth?

"I'm trying to find out what human nature is all about," Shaich, who now runs Panera's charitable foundation, told USA Today.

Panera Bread is no newcomer to helping those less fortunate. It regularly donates unsold baked goods to food banks and other charities. But this latest venture by Shaich and the foundation is much more ambitious.

It's similar to the "pay what you can" restaurants based on Salt Lake City's One World Everybody Eats, but will be much more upscale. The Panera Cares Cafés will feature standard Panera Bread fare.

The emphasis seems to be less on feeding hungry people and more on raising money for worthy causes. "Proceeds will go to pay store costs, and the remainder will go to community organizations, which Panera hasn't identified," the St. Louis Post-Dispatch says.

Shaich hopes to open hundreds of nonprofit Panera Cares Cafés across the United States if the Missouri restaurant can support itself.

Much depends on the answer to these questions:

- If people don't have to pay for their food, will they end up taking advantage and shorting the donation box? That would bring the experiment to a halt.
- Will regular customers begin to shun the place if homeless people show up? "While young people are very much attuned to helping out and making a difference, if they find themselves sitting next to other customers with whom they don't feel comfortable, they're not coming back," trends consultant Marian Salzman told USA Today. The nonprofit store is in Clayton, an upscale community.

We think the nonprofit café is a great idea. A wide range of opinions about it can be found at the Post-Dispatch website. For example:

- "This experiment in socialism is a feel good thing for Lefties. I hope thier clientele rips them off in a big way and they can chalk it up to lessons learned."
- "Wow, so now a company doing something good is a commie, left-wing nut job? I don't doubt that there is some tax incentive here, but the idea that a corporation would take this step is one in the right direction."
- "This is truly a company with a heart of gold. Too bad some cannot see a good action when one is made."

- "Time for Starbucks, Chipotle, MCDee and all the others to climb on board."

Do you think it will work?