

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

By Christopher Muther

GLOBE STAFF

NEW YORK — On a warm June morning, it seemed that no one inside Rue La Rue Café was having a conversation. Certainly no one was interested in sitting outside. Instead, all eyes were fixed on a large flat screen TV, which was showing the beloved sitcom “The Golden Girls.” There was even a small sing-along each time a new episode began.

“Thank you for being a friend!”

Think of this café as “The Golden Girls” promised land. Rue La Rue opened earlier this year and is dedicated to all things “Golden Girls,” and, more specifically, to Rue McClanahan, who played the man-hungry vixen Blanche Devereaux on the show. The sitcom about four women of a certain age sharing a home in Miami was a Saturday night staple from 1985 through 1992.

Rue La Rue is the best kind of “Golden Girls” experience. Not only can you sit near the banana leaf wallpaper, the same wallpaper that hung in Blanche’s bedroom, you can also feast upon a Stan “The Putz” Turkey Club, Sophia Petrillo’s famous lasagna al forno, and, most importantly, cheesecake. Even the bathroom tile looks like the bathroom on the show.

“I’m here first and foremost because I’m a huge fan of the show,” said William Peterson, who was visiting New York from London. “I watch ‘The Golden Girls’ whenever I’m feeling a bit down, it always cheers me up. I also came because I wanted to try the cheesecake.”

“I see a lot of people come through the door and they’ll actually be crying,” said Michael LaRue, co-owner of the café.

THE BEST CHEESECAKE EAST OF ST. OLAF



around the show, specifically with McClanahan. He met her at a fund-raiser for an animal charity 17 years ago, and the two quickly bonded.

“Over the years we got closer and closer,” he said. “I ended up becoming her producer. I wrote and produced the musical adaptation of her memoir, ‘My First Five Husbands . . . and the Ones Who Got Away.’”

After McClanahan passed away in 2010, the day-to-day responsibilities of running her estate went to LaRue. McClanahan has a son, Mark Bish, who is co-owner of the café.

LaRue said the most daunting task he faced after McClanahan’s death was going through everything that she left behind.

“Although she was known as a collector, in reality she was a hoarder with enough closets to hide everything,” he said. “One of the first things I found was a folder with notes that she passed to her girlfriends in grade school in the 1930s. I knew I was in trouble when I found her prom dress.”

He inventoried all of her possessions and then stored them in four 18-wheeler cargo containers. He said the café will rotate the displays of scripts, costumes, jewelry, adding that there’s enough material for “about 300 years.”

Customers inevitably ask about the quality of the cheesecake. Fans know that all problems could be solved with a slice of cheesecake and perhaps accompanied by a nonsensical tale from St. Olaf.

“Our cheesecake is made by a bakery in the Bronx, and it’s a wonderful New York classic cheesecake,” LaRue said. “The man who made all the cheesecakes for ‘The Golden Girls’ reached out to me recently. I’m going to try to get his recipe so we can make the original cheesecake that the girls were

"I'm able to go up to them and say, 'Who did you watch the show with?' I find a lot of people have this emotional connection, not just to the show, but to the person they used to watch the show with, be it a grandmother or mother. So, when they come in here those memories flood back."

Many of the recipes served here come from, or are inspired by, McClanahan's personal cookbooks and recipe collections, and those of her costars, including the Orange Poppy Seed Cake.

"It's an Oklahoma recipe McClanahan made her entire life," LaRue said. "It's Duncan Hines yellow cake mix, a package of Jell-O instant pudding, Tropicana orange juice, orange

peel and poppy seeds. You won't believe me, but it's delicious."

(Reporter's note: It was delicious.)

The memorabilia on display, much of which comes from McClanahan's estate, includes her 1987 Emmy for lead actress along with the ensemble she wore that night, several scripts, "Golden Girls" merchandise that has come out over the

years, and even a shrine dedicated to the Girls' yellow kitchen telephone.

More than 30 years after "The Golden Girls" debuted on NBC, love for the show does not appear to be abating. "The Golden Girls" runs in syndication in 50 countries. According to LaRue, there is always an episode of "The Golden Girls" airing somewhere in the world, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The show set the stage for female ensemble casts later found in "Sex and the City" and "Girls." But unlike the cosmopolitan gals of "Sex and the City," or the self-absorbed and occasionally maddening "Girls," "The Golden Girls" was relatable across a broader audience, even for those who don't qualify for an AARP card.

"Personally I think the reason that it crosses all sorts of

boundaries is that it speaks to this universal thing that we all share, which is a fear that as we age we're going to become irrelevant and invisible," LaRue said. "This show combats that fear by showing that you can have joy with your friends. I think it really gives people this sort of soothing balm when they have that fear of aging and being alone."

LaRue has a lot of memories

eating on the show. Now more than ever, the world could use a good cheesecake."

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A statue from McClanahan's home.



HERE

GO GLAMPING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Enjoy nature, camping, and cushy amenities at Huttopia's new site in the White Mountains — no roughing it required. Huttopia, a France-based organization with 30 sites across Europe and one in Canada, has just opened its first US site called Huttopia White Mountains. The village, located on a peaceful lakefront in Albany, includes a selection of two-story wood cabins with bathrooms, and canvas tents on wooden platforms, all furnished so you can simply unpack and relax. Or set up your own gear at a traditional camping spot and still enjoy all the

site's amenities. Swim in the lake or a heated pool, play at a private beach, go on a guided nature walk, and watch an outdoor movie. Then grab a homemade pizza from the Airstream caravan near the pool. Prices range from \$39 to \$220 per night. canada-usa.huttopia.com/en/site/white-mountains

SEE THE SUNRISE ON SUMMIT OF MOUNT WASHINGTON

Watch the sun come up while standing on the Northeast's highest peak, two days only this summer. The Mount Washington Auto Road opens early on July 30 (4 a.m.) and Aug. 27 (4:30 a.m.), allowing visitors to drive the 7.6-mile twisty road to the summit of

Mount Washington (6,288 feet) in time for sunrise. Pay your entrance fee at the Toll House at the bottom of the road, right off NH Route 16 (White Mountain Road). Arrive early so you don't have to wait long, since this special opportunity often draws many visitors. The State Park building at the summit will offer coffee and snacks each morning. Rates: \$17 (motorcycle) and \$29 (car), including driver; passengers under 5, free; \$7, ages 5-12; \$9, 13 and older. No bicycles, mopeds, or ATVs; see website for vehicle restrictions. 603-466-3988, www.mt-washingtonautoroad.com/events/sunrise-drives

THERE

WITNESS THE TOTAL ECLIPSE IN WYOMING

Head to the new Anvil Hotel in Jackson Hole, Wyo., to watch the total eclipse Aug. 21. The hotel, located on Cache Street in the historic downtown, offers a special full-day event for the viewing: Enjoy Moon Dust lattes and moon flow yoga in the morning, lunch from the hotel's Italian restaurant, Glorietta Trattoria, and live music throughout the afternoon. Then get special glasses to watch the eclipse and a time-lapse video of the event as a keepsake. The 49-room property, designed by New York-based Studio Tack, offers a classic western lodge feel. The lobby features cozy seating and a wood-burning stove (good for

chilly nights), and has a café with homemade treats from a local bakery, and a mercantile store. Rates: \$375 per person for the event only, which is open to the public; includes yoga, breakfast, lunch, glasses, and keepsake. \$1,030 per night, including two tickets to the event and accommodations; minimum four-night stay. 800-234-4507, www.anvilhotel.com

FLORIDA ADVENTURES FOR FAMILIES

Bring your kids to Grande Lakes Orlando and they can enjoy a hands-on farming lesson on the property's 18,000-square foot Whisper Creek Farm, a bike ride along a new trail, and a seaplane adventure. Grande Lakes, part of The Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott Orlando, has launched a series of farm-to-table experiences that lets guests become involved in the culinary process. During the Farm to Family experience, families get an extensive tour of the grounds, a farming lesson, and a chance to create their own lunch using ingredients they handpick on site. The property has also opened a new sports adventure center and created the 2-mile Hidden Lake mountain bike trail, offering use of its mountain bikes for guests. Or guests can take a new 30-minute seaplane excursion to the historic St. John's River, Florida's longest freshwater river, where they can enjoy three hours of guided fishing. Rates start at \$139 at JW Marriott Orlando, \$229 at The Ritz-Carlton Orlando. 407-393-4000, www.grandelakes.com

EVERYWHERE

A FIVE-STAR HAMMOCK FOR YOUR TRAVELS

Stash the Kammok Roo camping hammock and accessories in your backpack or travel bag, and you'll have one of the most durable, comfortable, and versatile sleeping shelters on your adventures. The spacious hammock, which holds up to 500 pounds, measures 10 feet long and 5.7 feet wide, and offers ample space for two people. It boasts Kammok's proprietary diamond ripstop-nylon LunarWave material that doesn't stretch or sag, can fend off water and the sun's harmful rays, and provides a highly breathable material for steamy nights. The Roo sets up quickly and easily using Kammok's climbing-grade carabiners and adjustable Python straps. Accessorize your Roo by adding the Glider weather shelter, which comes with a built-in water retention system, and the Dragonfly mosquito net, which keeps buzzing critters at bay (all sold separately). The best part: You can use it with Kammok's Koala Underquilt, a down quilt that attaches to the hammock and creates a cozy sleeping surface, protecting you in temps down to 30 degrees. The tear-resistant Roo packs down to melon size, weighs 24 ounces, and comes in six fun colors. \$99.99 for Roo, \$326 Koala, \$230 Glider, \$75 Dragonfly. 888-815-5162, www.kammok.com

KARI BODNARCHUK

