

Local news

Coffee shop a 'Dinette Set' regular

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Imagine the sheer hoot of waking up to see your business featured in a nationally syndicated comic strip.

That has happened twice in less than a year to Tina Stoeberl, who owns College Hill Coffee Co. and Casual Gourmet on Hamilton Avenue.

The first time was in May, when her shop was the subject of "The Dinette Set," which runs in The Enquirer.

The second surprise "Dinette Set" appearance came Sunday.

"It's exciting, it's fun, we've been getting all kinds of calls and e-mails," says Stoeberl, 42.

She never asked for this exposure. It came about because Stoeberl's partner, Elizabeth Sherwood, a huge fan of the comic strip, began exchanging e-mails with the cartoonist, Julie Larson, several years ago.

On her way to visit friends at Miami University last year, Larson's daughter visited the coffee shop and told her mom all about the place.

In May, a friend woke Stoeberl with a phone call to tell her the coffee shop was in the funnies that morning.

When College Hill Coffee hosted Larson for a book signing in November, Stoeberl says "hundreds" came to buy autographed books. After Christmas, Larson sent a copy of the strip featuring the shop, then Stoeberl was surprised again when another one ran Sunday.

In the latest strip, a customer wonders why the shop doesn't offer plain coffee with imitation flavored creamers. College Hill Coffee doesn't serve flavored creamers, nor does it offer "Glen Garry Glen Ross" coffee – another punch line in the comic.

In both strips, Larson has used the actual College Hill logo, which Stoeberl believes she scanned from a gift bag. And each time, the comic has featured a likeness of Stoeberl behind the counter, wearing short brown hair and tiny, round glasses.

"It's a cartoon version, but it's clearly me," she says.

Stoeberl doesn't think Larson, who lives in Chicago, knows this week is her second anniversary owning the shop. Stoeberl left the health insurance industry in 2005 to buy College Hill Coffee, which has been a neighborhood institution for 14 years. Stoeberl says customers are just as proud as she is that their coffee shop made the comics.

"I guess to (Larson) it's no big deal," she says. "But to us, this is a huge deal."

To see Sunday's Dinette Set comic online, go to www.arcamax.com/thedinetteset/s-281477-341573.