

Yvette Ysidro – Stearman Bar and Grill

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go out for lunch. There are lots of options. Some are sit-down restaurants. Some have drive-up windows. How about a fly-in restaurant? Today we'll learn about a remarkable fly-in restaurant in rural Kansas where customers can literally fly or drive in for a meal. It's today's Kansas Profile.

In recent weeks we have learned about aviation pioneers such as Clyde Cessna, Walter and Olive Ann Beach, and Lloyd Stearman. Today we'll visit a modern-day restaurant which bears Stearman's name. Yvette Ysidro and her husband Monte are the owners of the Stearman Bar and Grill at Stearman Field, a private airport near Benton northeast of Wichita.

The original owners of this airport were private pilots Dwayne and Julie Clemens. They built a hangar here, including a place where people could drink coffee and get a sandwich out of the fridge. As it became more popular, it evolved into a café called Stearman Bar and Grill.

Yvette and Monte grew up in this area. They are the owners of Specs Eyewear stores in Wichita, El Dorado, and Derby. One day while on vacation at the lake, Yvette and Monte got together with Dwayne and Julie. Dwayne and Julie had a surprise question for them: Would they be interested in purchasing the restaurant at Stearman Field?

"My husband always wanted to own a restaurant, so he was all for it," Yvette said. She was a little more cautious. "I came in and posed as an employee (with Dwayne and Julie's consent) for a month," Yvette said. This gave her an insider's view about how things worked. The results were positive, and the Ysidros bought the place in July 2013. They have expanded and enhanced it since.

Stearman Bar and Grill is literally located a few yards from the mile-long runway where airplanes come and go. The restaurant includes a large bar, a full menu, commercial grill, and gift shop. A person can eat and watch news or sports on the televisions inside, or do the same on the enclosed patio which is a converted airplane hangar with a huge fire pit and whole walls that can be opened up on nice days. If a person wants to get even closer to the airplanes, they can go to the outdoor patio and gazebo, just over a fence from the tarmac. Or, a person can simply fly in for lunch.

The restaurant itself is packed with aviation memorabilia, including lots of models of classic airplanes. A huge, 20 foot industrial ceiling fan spins overhead. Outside, the Ysidros have installed a playground for kids. During spring through fall, a breakfast buffet is available. A live band performs on stage on weekends. "We're known for fresh, hand-breaded chicken fry steaks," Yvette said.

Since Wichita is a key center of aviation manufacturing, lots of people with an interest in flying are attracted to this restaurant. They may come by car or by air. "It's common for us to have pilots fly in for lunch from all around," Yvette said. "We even get helicopters from Fort Riley.

"One time a guy called ahead for a table with a cloth and candle," Yvette said. He flew in and proposed to his girlfriend that day." Another couple went skydiving at the airport and got married after they landed. Wow, that is a unique wedding.

Another service offered at the airport is vintage airplane rides. A company named Vintage Flyers, unrelated to the restaurant, offers biplane rides by appointment. Customers can go up in a beautifully restored Stearman PT-17, a classic open cockpit biplane dating back to 1942.

The fascination with flying brings lots of customers to the restaurant. “We’ve had customers from as far away as Singapore, Austria, and Japan,” Yvette said. That’s impressive for a restaurant in a rural community like Benton, population 821 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to www.stearmanbarandgrill.com.

It’s great to find the restaurant bringing in customers by car and by air. We salute Yvette and Monte Ysidro for making a difference with an aviation-themed restaurant. I’m glad their idea could take off and fly.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.