

Café Culture



At La Petite France, plain and filled croissants are popular at breakfast and throughout the day.

La Petite France offers fresh pastries and lunches – and a memorable staff

By Sean Corcoran / Photography by Jim Preston

Ian Parent never expected that his café, La Petite France on Main Street in Hyannis, would become so well known for its pot-roast special. Lines can stretch out the door for his almond-raisin chicken salad, and the small café is rightly respected for its French bread and fresh soups. But the popularity of the pot roast took Parent by surprise.

"It was something that happened by accident," he says. "I bought one from one of my vendors, and I had it one day. People loved it so much, I now have pot roast every Wednesday."

The pot roast goes in the oven at 4 a.m.



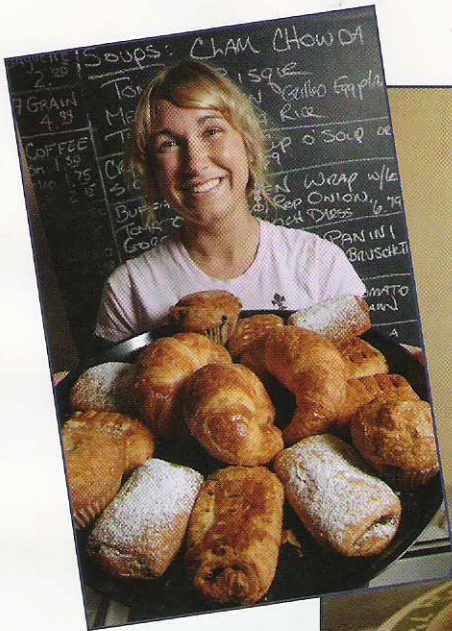
Ian Parent makes his own French bread daily.

and it's ready by 11:30 a.m. It's so popular, he went from making four pounds of pot roast when he started the special to fifteen pounds now. But it still sells out.

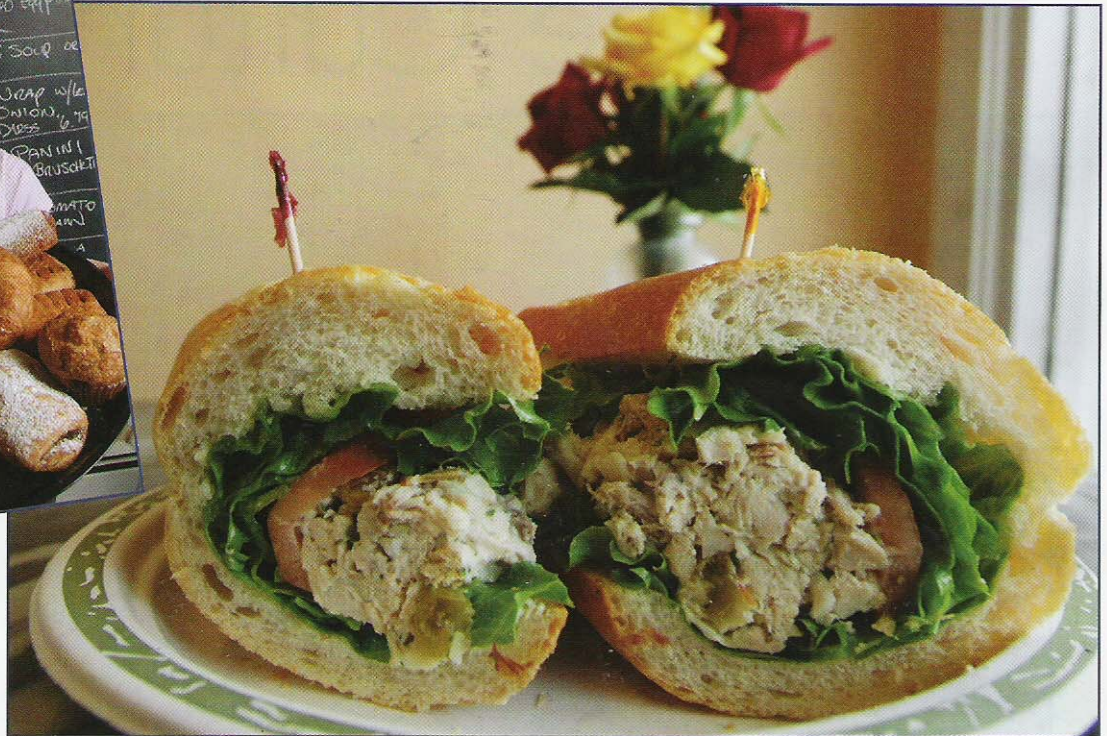
"It's simple. I serve it with a deli mustard and a horseradish cheddar," he says. "It's my grandmother's old recipe."

Most everything served at La Petite France is made fresh. Parent prepares vegetable salads, pasta salads and bakery goods every morning. He prepares his own roast beef for the sandwiches and he assembles between four and six soup choices daily.

The menu changes seasonally,



Sophie Moeller usually knows what pastries her regular customers want – sometimes before they do.



Almond-raisin chicken salad is tasty on French bread or on a salad.

and in addition to soups and sandwiches, paninis and calzones are always available, as are croissants, muffins and cookies.

Parent, who is thirty-five, learned the café business when he was nineteen from the La Petite France's founder, Lucien Digioanni. Digioanni trained in France as a baker and was a pastry chef at the White House during the Reagan administration, Parent says. "He taught me how to make bread, croissants and how to run a business on Cape Cod and survive!" Digioanni sold the café when he returned to France in 2004, and Parent bought it a year later. Foot traffic has steadily increased since.

The atmosphere is comfortable and bright, ideal for reading the newspaper with a breakfast sandwich and a cup of coffee (freshly roasted in Wellfleet by Beanstock Coffee Roasters) or meeting friends for lunch.

A significant portion of the café' charm and success comes from Sophie Moeller, who works the counter and seems to know almost every customer's name. She makes it her job to remember such things as who likes onions on their sandwich and who hates mayonnaise.

"Sophie is absolutely phenomenal, amazing," Parent says. "Half the reason people show up here is because of her."



Ian Parent rolls the dough at his Hyannis café

A business like his cannot survive without someone like Sophie, Parents says. He works to provide a quality product at good prices; his wife and co-owner, Heidi, does the bookkeeping and decorating; and Sophie dishes out fine customer service.

"I'm the soul of the business," Parent says. "Sophie is the face and my wife Heidi is the brains and culture." ♦

La Petite France Café is at 349 Main Street, Hyannis; 508-775-1067; www.lapetitefrancecafe.com.