

## Annie Okie's Runway Café ... and Wedding Chapel?

### **Wiley Post Airport, Oklahoma City, OK**

Story and photos by Bob Kemper for SW Aviator



Don't be surprised when you walk into the Annie Okie's Runway Café at Oklahoma City's Wiley Post airport to find a bridge game, a board meeting, or a birthday party in the ante room. If you stick around long enough, chances are you'll witness a truly special event—owner, Joan Ackley, often strolls around the tables playing guitar and singing folk songs and old standards. The family atmosphere necessitates careful navigation of the toy airplanes spread out in front of the large screen TV, which continually runs aviation videos.

Preparations for a wedding, or a wedding reception are not out of the ordinary. Just recently, Ashley Alonzo, a waitress, and Anthony Redding, a cook, were married at the cafe. Private parties, birthday parties, and wedding receptions are usual. A couple of years ago, a local pilot's memorial service was held in the cafe. "When we first opened it was all men in here...there wasn't a woman or child anywhere in sight," Joan said. "Early on, we realized that the cafe wasn't going to make it on airport traffic alone. We needed to bring in people who were not only pilots, but ordinary people who liked to watch the airplanes," Joan added.

Memories failed to recall when the first restaurant was opened at Wiley Post, but a safe bet is that it was concurrent with the opening of the control tower and terminal in 1959. Nor are the local airport historians sure of how many restaurant owners have come and gone since '59; six-months here, nine-months there, maybe an occasional year and a half or so, but be sure that there have been many. The restaurant business has one of the highest mortality rates of about any business venture—excepting FBO's. However, with the arrival of Joan and David Ackley in 1994, the beleaguered airport cafe received what it had always needed: a vision and good management.

Annie Okie's Runway Cafe is typical and yet, atypical of many airport cafes around the country. The menu, which lists over eighty items, is a testament to good American café fair. Prices range from a \$1.99 for a cup of soup to \$7.99 for

the butterfly shrimp. Every day there is a lunch special starting at an affordable \$3.99.

What is atypical is the freshness and homemade nature of the food. They bake their own hamburger buns and dinner rolls from scratch daily. The 1/3 pound hamburgers are marinated in a delicious special sauce, and the French fries and hashbrowns are made with real potatoes, never the frozen variety. Soups are also made from scratch. Additionally, their fantastic salsa, barbecue sauce, hickory sauce, and marinara are all made in-house. Their huge omelets are unique in that they are oven baked, which gives them a wonderful taste and texture...somewhat souffle-like. Pilots have flown hundreds of miles for the monster cinnamon rolls. I have often tried, but have never been able to finish, one of these fresh baked wonders alone. Bring your copilot.



Good food is a story and a reason in itself, but it is not the only reason behind the ten-year success of Runway Cafe. The real story of the cafe is its customers, and the bond of community that they share. Never was this more evident than during a Saturday morning breakfast fly-in when Jim and Carol Thomas of Yukon, OK, brought their five-day old son Jacob Alan Thomas, to meet the "tribe." Jimmy Thomas, Jim's 21-year old son, has been flying in most every Saturday morning with his dad for at least the past ten-years. He is now graduating with honors from the University of Oklahoma with a degree in electrical engineering. Not a bad community in which to be raised, I'd say.

Access to Wiley Post Airport (PWA) is about as easy as it gets. Whether you're arriving VFR or IFR, the approaches are clear and the runways are long. Annie Okie's Runway Cafe is in the terminal building just under the control tower. Plenty of aircraft parking is available in front of the tower. Two FBOs are on the field, The Service Center (405-789-5000) and Million Air (405-787-4040).

Annie Okie's Runway Cafe is located near the base of the control tower, in the same building. There is ample aircraft parking in front of the restaurant. The cafe is open seven days a week for breakfast and lunch. Hours are Mon through Thurs and Sat 7 am to 3 pm, Fri 6 am to 3 pm, and Sun 8 am-3 pm. Call 405-787-7732 for more information.