

Pendroy's Finest

Patrons-turned-friends say dining at the Rose Room is worth a trip to this tiny town

STORY BY SYDNE GEORGE | PHOTOS BY KENTON ROWE

It pays to be friendly in the restaurant business. Bob and Dorene Sheeler have learned this lesson well in the 37 years they've owned and operated the Rose Room in Pendroy.

It's "Downtown Pendroy's Finest Dining" and says so right on their business card. If you've ever been to Pendroy, a tiny community north of Choteau and west of Conrad and have dined at the Rose Room, you just have to smile in agreement.

Homesteaders began staking out property in the northern part of Teton County in 1909. Levi "Boots" Pendroy, the town's namesake and right-hand man to the Great Northern Railway's James J. Hill, came to Montana to extend a rail line north of Choteau in 1916.

Described as "a-jumping and a-going and becoming a town that's fast a-growing" in the August 17, 1916, *Conrad Observer*, Pendroy reached a peak population of about 450 in the 1920s. In the town's early days, you could play pool and cards and get your hair cut at Cornett's Pool Hall, go square dancing at The Golden Slipper, sleep at the Pendroy Hotel and bank at Farmers State Bank. ▶

Pendroy sits near the Rocky Mountain Front, north of Choteau.



This page, top: The Rose Room in Pendroy. Below: Owner Dorene Sheeler works behind the bar. Facing page: The bar-restaurant is a community gathering place.

When the bank closed in 1933, Pendroy, an early homesteader and businessman, sold his farm, moved into town and bought the building which is now the Rose Room.

Originally used to sell liquor, gas, oil and ice cream, the building became The Bank Inn in 1947 and was owned by Al and Leone Frank. Later the bar was sold to Al Hagelwanter of Brady, who in turn sold it to Paul Rose in 1950, who changed it to the Rose Room. A dining room was added before Dick and Zee Amundsen

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Debbie Stokes, Pendroy’s postmaster

purchased it in 1970. Zee then took over cooking and Dick handled bartending and also provided chiropractic services on site.

Local attorney Scott Swanson, who has fond memories of growing up in Pendroy and moved back home to run his law practice, recalls receiving “treatments” from Dick Amundsen at the bar when he was on break from college.

Walking into the Rose Room, you can still see the Farmers State Bank logo in the tile in the entryway. The work dates back to the 1920s.

This is the same bank, in an odd coincidence, that Dorene Sheeler’s grandparents, Albert and Nellie Lloyd, banked at after homesteading in 1903 about 16 miles from Pendroy, something Dorene discovered after they bought the Rose Room.

At that time, Dorene admits she hated cooking and had never been a waitress, but she jumped in and did what was needed to make a go of it. Known over the years for its steak, seafood and hospitality, these days the Rose Room is a destination for special events. Debbie Stokes, the town postmaster for the past 29 years, calls dinner at the Rose Room “an event.”

“Dorene keeps things moving and shaking at the Rose Room,” Stokes says, adding that at 70-something, Dorene, who is referred to as “Miss Daisy” by her employees, has more energy



than many people half her age.

If you ask Bob what it takes for a restaurant to survive in a small town like Pendroy, he’ll say “just be friendly.” But his definition of friendly is expansive. In addition to running the bar and restaurant, Bob has a towing business and has helped many stranded travelers. Their next stop is often the Rose Room.

A sign hanging in the dining room, “Angels Meet Here,” is a gift from a college student who went off the road and was rescued by the Sheelers, who provided her with hospitality and a place to stay. Bob has a collection of similar stories of how he met different friends who “took a liking to us,” ate at the Rose Room and have come back again and again.

“Dorene has managed to establish this as a popular destination for fine dining,” says Swanson. “When someone in Conrad or Choteau thinks of going out for a special occasion, the Rose Room is near the top of the list.”

Life in Pendroy runs at a slower pace, Stokes says, but that doesn’t mean it’s any easier. People here work hard and eight hours of work does not mean the end of the day. Almost every member of the community has served on the volunteer fire department. Bob says that while Pendroy’s population is about 25, 23 of them are members of the department. Pendroy is rich with people



who give back to their community and the world around them, much like the Sheelers.

When Bob and Dorene bid you farewell after dinner, they’ll tell you they’ll see you next time. And like so many patrons, you have a feeling you’ll be back: to hear an entertaining story, to master that puzzle on the bar or get another taste of the shrimp offered at the Rose Room, Downtown Pendroy’s Finest Dining. **M**

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