

# 'Seinfeld' a treat to deli's TV fans

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Seinfeld, that hit television show about nothing, seems to have something for everyone.

When Bitterman's Deli opened in downtown Santa Barbara last May, co-owner Shannon Feld and her husband, Benny Feld, wanted to have television in their Canon Perdido Street restaurant, but it turned out that their section of town has no cable service, and therefore no TV.

Hmmm. What about all those "Seinfeld" episodes they videotaped over the past year?

"We liked the show. He's Jewish and it's all set in New York, and we thought, "Gosh, this really fits in with the deli," Shannon Feld explained. "But we didn't know how society in general would like it. So we just threw in the tape to see how people would react-and they loved it."

Nowadays, customers expect to see "Seinfeld" playing at Bitterman's. They sometimes get anxious when it's off for the few minutes it takes to change a tape, Feld said. "There are some serious 'Seinfeld' addicts in this town."

Occasionally, potential customers avoid the deli because of its continuous "Seinfeld" showings, but those people are clearly the exception, Feld said.

The biggest obstacle to showing "Seinfeld" came recently in an unfriendly letter from the legal department of Castle Rock Entertainment, the show's producer. The message: Stop playing "Seinfeld" in the deli.

But that threat seems to have subsided.

Oddly enough, the encounter with Castle Rock resulted in tickets to see a live taping last month of a future "Seinfeld" episode - one in which Seinfeld's pal George tries to get a job. In between set changes, Jerry Seinfeld chatted with the studio audience, Feld said, and she got a chance to ask him whether he had heard about Bitterman's Deli and its daily "Seinfeld" showings. He had.

"We own it," Feld told him. "Do you know why they gave you tickets to this show?" Seinfeld asked. Feld wasn't sure.

"Because they're bulldozing your deli right now."

He was, of course, joking. Penny Davies, co-owner of the Earthling Bookshop in downtown Santa Barbara, was eager to show the Sept. 16 season premiere of "Seinfeld" at her store after she learned that Bantam Books, publisher of the best-selling "SeinLanguage," a collection of Jerry Seinfeld's comic observations, would offer promotional support to bookstores interested in holding a premiere party.

"When they came up with the idea I knew it was terrific because people love 'Seinfeld,'" Davies said.

Besides being at the top of the New York Times' Best Sellers List, "SeinLanguage" is the Earthling's current top seller, she said.

"The books are disappearing faster than I can tell you," Davies said.

The only catch was that, like Bitterman's Deli, the Earthling can't get cable. Davies said a Cox Cable representative informed her that trenches would have to be dug to connect the Earthling with cable service. The bookstore arranged to get an advance tape of the premiere instead.

About 60 people gathered at the back of the bookstore to watch. Three dozen chairs filled up quickly prior to the 9 p.m. show-time.

The rest of the crowd watched from aisles between bookshelves marked "Aging," "Psychology," "Women's Studies," "Men's Studies" and "Death and Dying" - a perfect setting for viewing a program that makes frequent comedic forays through just such subject areas.

Having a look-alike contest was the bookstore's idea, Davies said, inspired by the episode last season in which auditions were held for a mock-"Seinfeld" sitcom called "Jerry" dreamed up by "Seinfeld" characters Jerry and George.

Ken DelRosso, 37, a Santa Barbara painting contractor, and Shannon Feld, 22, the Bitterman's Deli co-owner, were the uncontested winners for Jerry and Elaine, respectively.

Groans of disappointment could be heard in the audience that no Kramer look-alikes came forward. One man announced that he used to look like Kramer, but recently got his hair cut. There were no Georges.



Elaine  
Benes