

Chris Brown gives new meaning to the notion of a “regular” customer.

For the past 26 years, he has stopped by the Beach Street Café in downtown Manchester---by---the---Sea most every day for morning coffee and a blueberry muffin, or perhaps an onion, mushroom and pepper omelet.

He returns because of the service and the ambiance: “It’s just a nice and bright sunny place,” he said.

Bob Atwater says he opened the café 26 years ago with the idea of offering just such a welcoming environment and good food.

The café attracts a mix of residents and visitors who may be seeking a light breakfast or the full monty.

Either can be had, and lots in between. The menu includes traditional fare along with some unusual omelets, like meatloaf and cheese, cinnamon apple cheddar, and even barbecue beef.

Kristin Gulbrandsen, a waitress and Atwater’s niece, said her uncle and fellow cook Matt Wallace deliver a winning meal.

“They have omelet---making down to a science,” she said.

The café also offers four specialty egg dishes involving Hollandaise sauces: Eggs Benedict, Florentine, Salmon, and Portobello. And muffins are another specialty, with choices including raspberry, banana, chocolate chip, and even a trail mix muffin called a Morning Glory.

About a year ago, the windows were replaced to allow for a larger view. The café also has a sun room to the side where diners can watch trains and traffic come and go.

“You get to watch the town go by,” Gulbrandsen said.

Her mom, Joan Carnevale, who is Atwater’s sister, was pregnant with her when Atwater opened the restaurant. Joan, who worked at the restaurant, and Bob came from a family with six siblings, and three worked at the café. Some of their children continue the tradition of working together as a family.

“I’ve grown up in this restaurant. When I was about 13, I began busing some tables and I’ve been here ever since. Bob’s a really good boss,” Gulbrandsen said.

She and Kim Tucker, a waitress at Beach Street for five years, are both 2001 graduates of Manchester---Essex Regional High School. There is an easy camaraderie

among the employees because of their close connections.

“We all know each other, and that makes it a friendly atmosphere,” Tucker said. Maryline Dickman, 84, of Magnolia is another regular. She often stops in for coffee and a blueberry muffin, sometimes an egg, when she steals a moment for herself.

“The girls are just so nice here,” said Dickman, who visits after swimming at the athletic club and before she begins her Meals on Wheels service. The staff know many of their customers so well that when a particular vehicle pulls up, they begin preparing their food.

Another customer stops in nearly every morning. He and Gulbrandsen talk about all the sporting events that took place the previous evening.

“We are big sports fans here,” she said.

Atwater, who was recognized in 2004 by the local Chamber of Commerce, is married to artist Tracy Atwater. While he shies away from the limelight, his wife didn’t mind have a breakfast item named after her. The McTracy is an egg and cheese sandwich on an English muffin, for \$3.25.