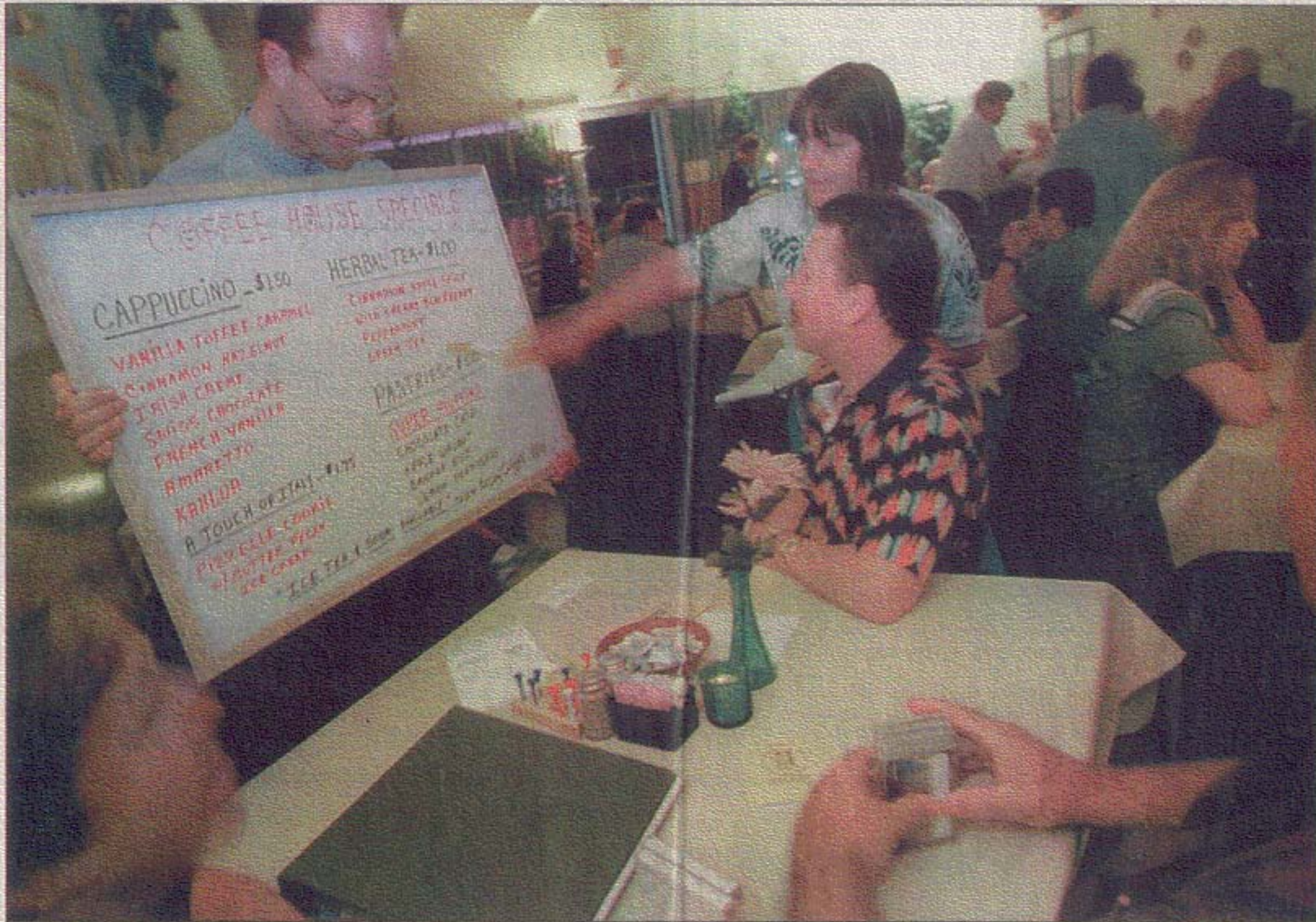


# Christian coffeehouse perks interest



Photos by MELISSA LYTTLE

DuWayne Sipper, left, carries a menu board while Shirley Mulligan takes orders Saturday during a trial run for Village Cafe Coffee House Christian night. Volunteers were not familiar with the menu or making certain drinks but got lots of practice. With only word-of-mouth advertising, 50-60 people showed up.



■ A trial run draws a large crowd to a ministry project that serves up coffee, music, skits, games and snacks to Christian customers.

By LISA PEEPLES  
Times Correspondent

#### CRYSTAL RIVER

If cappuccino, espresso, delectable, Texas-sized muffins, karaoke and table games in a Christian-based setting sounds like your cup of tea, you might want to try the coffeehouse that just opened in Crystal River.

The Village Cafe Coffee House in the Varnadoe Plaza is having its grand opening from 7 to 11 p.m. tonight, and you're invited.

The coffeehouse ministry project is sponsored by WXJC-FM 91.9 in Homosassa, and the Village Cafe in Crystal River provides the location.

Peter Swartz, station manager at WXJC, said there are three reasons the station decided to head up the ministry venture of a Christian-based coffeehouse.

"Our three goals are: first, to provide a nice, wholesome and clean atmosphere for the Christian community; second, to provide a place where other Christians can gather and fellowship with other Christians; and third, . . . to draw in non-believers and present a positive atmosphere where they might see that Christians can have an enjoyable time," he said.

The Village Cafe, which he said seats 56 for breakfast and lunch, is

transformed into a more relaxed coffeehouse setting on Friday evening, with tan tablecloths and mellow torch lighting.

Cappuccino, espresso, herbal teas, ice tea, soft drinks, pastries and savory muffins of all flavors are available at a reasonable cost.

Christian karaoke, chess, checkers, dominoes, biblical skits, folk singing and more are offered to the coffee-connoisseur.

Last weekend, Swartz said coffeehouse volunteers had a dry run to see how well the serving and entertainment would flow for the grand opening.

He said they expected 30 or so people to attend but were amazed when 50-60 showed up to help or visit the coffeehouse.

"People were just coming out of the woodwork, and it was pouring rain outside. I was overwhelmed . . . but everybody handled themselves quite well," he said and chuckled.

Expressing excitement, Swartz said, "I went home that night so wound up that I sat in front of the computer and played solitaire for a while. I had not anticipated the response we had."

He said one highlight of the evening came when a girl, about 6, wanted to sing karaoke. She was unable to read the words, so she just started singing a "simple praise song."

"Just spontaneously, like someone flipped on this big switch, the whole place started singing with her. It was like God was in control of the whole thing," he said.

Swartz said he is not the only one ecstatic with the response during the dry



Lindsey Rushton, 7, shows her loose front tooth to Serhiy Semeniuk, 7, at Village Cafe Coffee House Christian night Saturday in Crystal River. WXJC-FM 91.9 sponsors the ministry project, and Village Cafe provides the location.

run. He has heard only positive comments from those who attended, he said.

"What I am hearing is that people are very thrilled with the idea that there is somewhere they can go, to sit and enjoy and have fellowship with others while not being smattered with all the garbage that is around," he said.

Swartz said the coffeehouse is open

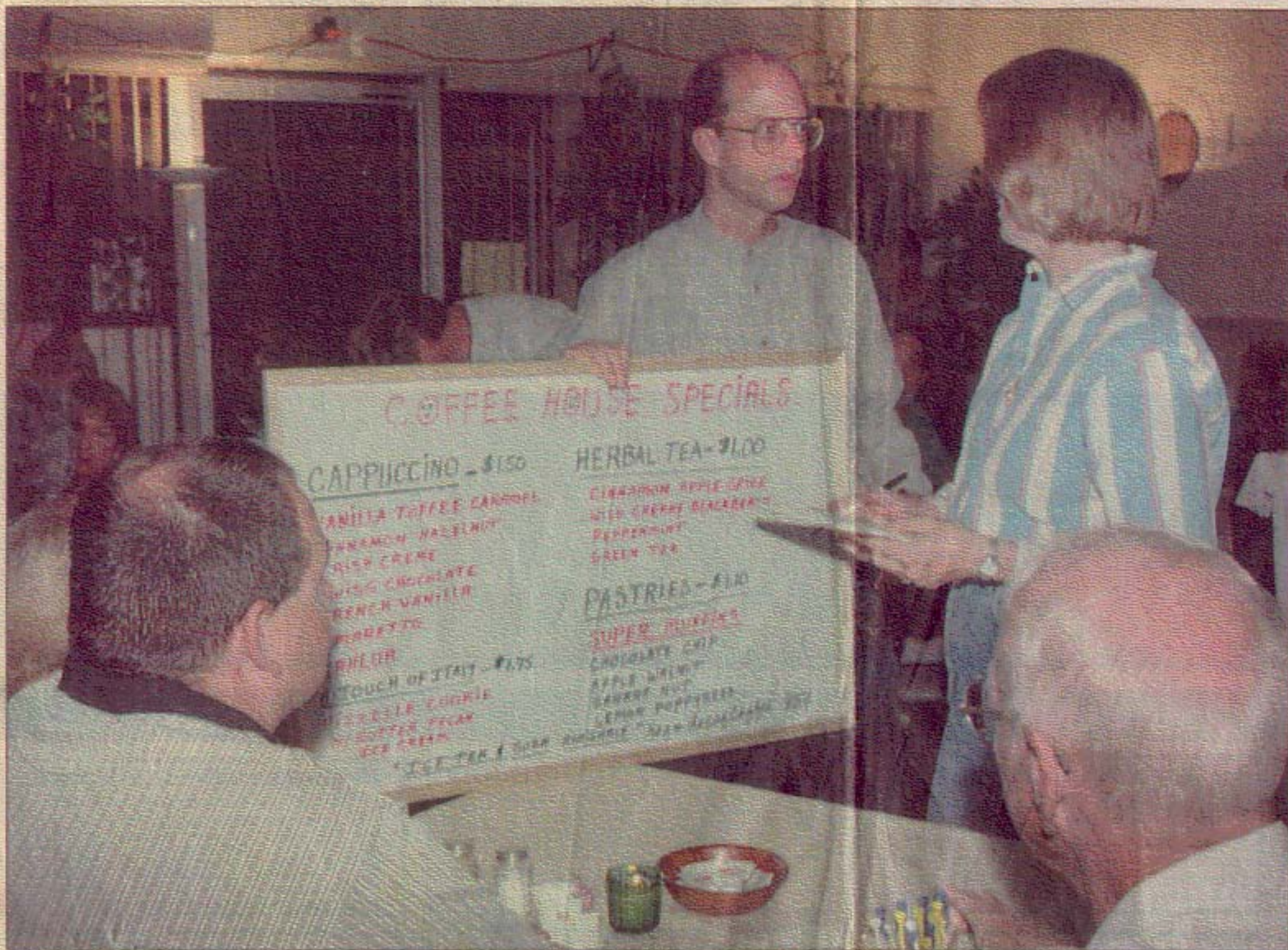
to all, from teens to grandparents. "We are not trying to categorize this thing, it is for the whole community," he said.

He said karaoke is offered from 8 to 10 p.m. Saturday, and the coffeehouse will be open from 7 to 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

If you are interested in performing or volunteering at the coffeehouse, call Swartz at 621-0402.



*Village Cafe Coffee House in Varnadoe Village in Crystal River where people can meet relax, drink cappuccino and experience Christian fellowship.*



*San March/for the Chronicle*

The Village Cafe in Varnadoe Village in Crystal River will be hosting a Christian Coffee House with Christian karaoke and cappuccino on Friday and Saturday nights from 7 pm. to 10 p.m. Pictured seated, from the left, are: James Alexander and Stuart Simmons contemplating what flavor cappuccino to try from volunteer servers DuWayne Sipper and Linda Hitchkiss.



# Coffee Christian style

By Nancy Kennedy  
Chronicle writer

**ANYONE FOR CAPPUCCINO?** How about a place to go on Friday or Saturday night where you can sit and relax, play a board game or two, meet new friends or visit with old ones, bring your family. Listen to Christian music and even sing karaoke? How about the Village Cafe Coffee House located at the Village Cafe in Varnadoe Village on Gulf-to-Lake Highway in Crystal River? They say the coffee's hot and the fellowship is warm and inviting.

They are a group of Citrus County Christians led by Peter Swartz, station manager at radio station WXJC in Homosassa. "We've been talking about doing something like this for quite a while," said Swartz a few days before the coffeehouse's "dress rehearsal" last Saturday night. The grand opening took place last night, with Wally Cosgrin, host of the daily *Champions of Truth* radio broadcast, playing guitar and singing.

Although this is a new venture in Citrus County, Christian coffeehouse ministry is nothing new to Swartz. A minister with a wide range of experience for more than 20 years, he ran a coffeehouse in Sarasota in the 70s, call-

ing it an extremely fruitful ministry. "Christian coffeehouse ministry can be quite effective if done right," he explained. "It wasn't uncommon for us to lead people to the Lord on a Saturday night, then take them right down to the beach for baptism."

He emphasized the purpose of this type of ministry is *not* to preach or hit guests over the head with the gospel, but to provide a place where ministry can happen: low lighting, background music, good food, hot coffee, friendly team members on hand to serve. Swartz said the Lord does the rest.

"There are a lot of lonely people around here," he said, "and there aren't a lot of places to go — wholesome places — where singles can meet or families or couples can go to enjoy themselves. This is a place where teens can come, as well as older people." He said during their planning and research stage, they received interest from a wide range of age groups, and a wide range showed up for the first night's dress rehearsal. Swartz said the packed crowd looked like a family reunion, with everyone enjoying the company of everyone else. Not even the rain that night dampened their spirits or their enthusiasm.

In traditional coffeehouse fashion,

the Village Cafe Coffeehouse serves a variety of cappuccino and espresso drinks, herbal teas and specialty desserts. Friday nights feature live music, with karaoke on Saturday. For those who like to play, table games are provided (no outside games allowed). Mostly, conversation is the main attraction — and the reason the coffeehouse team members wanted such a ministry in the county to begin with.

"We wanted to have a place where everyone feels welcome," said Swartz. "It's not like a concert; you don't have to sit and pay attention to the musicians, but you can if you want to. There's nobody who will stand up and preach, but individuals can share their faith among themselves; it's that kind of atmosphere. We want to see this as a place where Christians can go, but also a place where non-Christians feel at home too. It's relaxing. Comfortable. Non-threatening. A place where deep conversation can take place."

Swartz said he and the other team members envision this as *the* place to go on a weekend night in Citrus County. They've even invested in a state-of-the-art karaoke machine and accompanying music. Swartz mentioned that it was a huge hit at their dress rehearsal, and that people had a great time. The

place was filled to capacity, and at one point they ran out of chairs. "We served a lot of cappuccino," he said.

Serving that night and every weekend night is a team of volunteers from the community, including WXJC listeners and members of the Sunshine Christian Singles. Coffeehouse team members arrive early each night, set the tables, light the candles, arrange the halogen torch lamps and pray for whomever the Lord will bring in that night. During the operating hours (7 to 10 p.m.), they serve as waitresses and waiters and ministers of God as the Holy Spirit leads them. Cappuccino and Christ, Friday and Saturday nights.

"Ultimately, our goal is to be a blessing to the Christian community, giving them an alternative place to go on the weekends," he said. "In my experience, this is a great opportunity, with great potential. Just by greeting someone at the door and saying, 'Hi. Where are you from? What brought you in tonight?' opens up opportunities to encourage someone going through a problem, or just meeting a new friend."

For further information about the Village Cafe Coffeehouse or to talk to someone about performing Christian music on a Friday night, call WXJC radio station at 621-0402.