Meet the REGULARS!

By DANA SCHUSTER

Certain New Yorkers don’t care about hot new restaurants — they just want to go to a place where everybody knows their name.

Diner Dandy Wellington mixes business and pleasure at The Smith — he goes there five times a week to dig into mac and cheese, mussels and orecchiette.

THE REGULAR: Dandy Wellington HIS HAUNT: The Smith
55 Third Ave.; 212-430-9800

The 26-year-old producer, performer, stylist and self-proclaimed dandy, at John Wellington Simon, lives in Harlem, yet that doesn’t stop him from making the 45-minute, two-train trek to new East Village mainstay The Smith up to five times a week. “The thing about being a New Yorker, it’s always important to have a place that you can call your own. But also a great place,” he says, “I can do anything at The Smith, I can go there during the day and do work and eat really great food. I can bring friends for dinner or have business meetings there.”

Wellington has become “addicted” to The Smith, which replaced the Pizzeria Uno located there about two years ago. (It’s in good company; Chelsea Clinton is also frequently spotted there.) Now, aside from his own home cooking, The Smith’s cuisine almost entirely comprises his diet. “I don’t care about the newest or latest restaurants,” he proclaims. Wellington’s friends know they can find him at The Smith, where more often than not, he dines alone. His table is the first banquette on the right when you walk in. He’s not concerned with perks. “If they’re busy, they’re busy. It’s a business. I’m definitely not some VIP, but if they have some space, they’ll take me into consideration. They’ll say, ‘Ok, Dandy is here, let’s figure out if any of his tables will be open soon.’”

By no means is this a restaurant column — after all, they take reservations! It’s a look at six diners, who make eating out a matter of habit. hot spots for one tried-and-true restaurant they eat at as many as five times a week. Even Russell Brand has seemingly decided to make La Esquina his main dining destination. The comedian has been as ubiquitous a fixture at the restaurant as fiancé Katy Perry’s summer hit “California Gurls” is on the radio. There are some perks to being a restaurant fixture: prime seating, the occasional complimentary soufflé and not having to worry about picking a place to eat. Here, and on the next page, is a look at six diners, who make eating out a matter of habit.
THE REGULAR: Charles Kipps
HIS HAUNT: Elaine’s
1703 Second Ave.; 212-534-8003

A regular since the 1980s, writer Charles Kipps says he owes a lot to the East Side salon and its ubiquitous owner, Elaine Kaufman. “Every single thing I’m doing and have done, I can trace back to Elaine,” says Kipps, who met his literary agent there, thanks to some introductions by Kaufman. For regular eating habits at his usual spot, Kipps admits, “The only consistent thing would be a martini straight up with a twist.”

But going to Elaine’s isn’t just about the food and drink, he says. “It’s like a very complex dinner party every night, and she pulls it off.”

He even saw George Steinbrenner there, talking championship sports with Kaufman after beating the Red Sox for the 2003 pennant. Just don’t expect any special service, even if you are one of the most regular regulars. “There’s no such thing as discounts, no such thing as happy hours and no such thing as any type of coupon,” says Kipps, noting he’ll occasionally get a complimentary drink. “Elaine does what she wants to do in that regard.”

THE REGULAR: Marcus Page
HIS HAUNT: Serendipity 3
225 E. 60th St.; 212-888-3031

Marcus Page, 48, always starts off his lunch with a frozen hot chocolate — he’s been imbuing a pre-meal frozen hot chocolate since the age of 16, when he first started going to Serendipity. “My mom was a regular; my sisters were. I remember going with my mom dressed very monochromatic, with the satin belt and the shirt popping out, and all the food going by and all the overdramaturgy,” Page says. “It’s a rite of passage in New York.” Nowadays, Page is a TriBeCa decorator. But he keeps his childhood close to heart (and stomach) by holding business lunches at the famed dessert mecca about three times a week.

“Like going home,” he says. “I don’t have my immediate family any longer, so this is close to it as one can get.”

A home with plenty of celeb siblings including Miley Cyrus, Bill Clinton — and Lady Gaga.

But Page is less concerned with hobnobbing and line-skipping (“I usually just pushed to the front of the queue,” he says) than with eating Serendipity’s sinfully delicious treats. His favorite dish is the Young Chicken Sandwich, “unless I’m dieting,” he says. Does that nix the frozen treat? No, says Page. “We always have a frozen hot chocolate as a starter.”

THE REGULAR: Jesse Kearney
HIS HAUNT: Joe Allen
120 W. 46th St.; 212-583-6444

When the waiters decide to name a month after you, it’s safe to say you’re family. Such was the case for Jesse Kearney, 34, when the Joe Allen waitstaff honored the legal secretary and musical theater writer a few years ago with an unofficial “Jesse Month.” “It was partly because it was my birthday that month,” says Kearney. “But they just started giving me different treats during the whole month … it was cool.”

Kearney got hooked on Joe Allen in 1999, when he was introduced to the theater clubhouse during a “magical” night in grad school. “It was just such a great spot. Sean Penn was there that night; it was good food; the atmosphere was warm and inviting to artists,” says Kearney. Now the Park Slope resident hits the Theater District spot at least three times a week — for Monday night Mexican specials, steak and eggs at Sunday brunch and his burger fix. “I usually eat by myself. I know enough of the regulars that, any night I’m there, we all hang out. We all kind of know each other,” he says. You can usually find Kearney perched by his favorite spot at the corner of the bar, if it’s occupied, he’ll sit elsewhere until it’s free. “Then, I make a mad dash. If I don’t, four or five other people will,” he says. “It’s a fun thing.”

Jesse Kearney had a very special birthday at his favorite restaurant.