

Foodshed – Pizza & Pasta

By Kimberly Horg



(<http://nvmarketplace.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/foodshed-wp.jpg>)

A bag of chips and a soda is not what most people would consider a balanced meal. Many children grow up thinking healthy food isn't a necessity so one local establishment is trying to break the chain for disadvantaged youth by turning the table on greens.

Foodshed Pizza and Pasta opened in July of this year with the hope of making a difference in its community. Co-owners Giovanni Guerrera, Sean Pramuk, Michael Miguel and James Ehrlich have dreams of a profitable restaurant that also works as a tool to teach kids how to cook.

It temporarily hires local interns referred from On The Move (OTM), to help to create a new kind of job training program in the Napa Valley. Its goal is to not only teach healthy eating but promote leadership skills and economic self-reliance among Napa's low-income population.

OTM plays a critical ongoing role by providing financial support for the Foodshed Internship Program as well as identifying internship candidates. It found the funding to kick start the program.

“We’re thrilled to create the private-public partnership, combining our background with youth in need with foodies at Foodshed,” Leslie Medine, On the Move Senior Fellow, said. “There are many young people in our community who just need their first chance to prove that they can be successful in the world of work.”

Medine says On the Move’s Foodshed interns not only become part of the whole “farm to table” movement but get a great employment experience. Guerrero and Pramuk are great trainers who hold a high bar that will ultimately make a big difference in the life of each of these youth.

Guerrero and Pramuk are former business partners who owned Uva Trattoria in downtown Napa from 2001-2009 so the two know what it takes to run a successful restaurant business.

Guerrero fell in love with the idea of starting a restaurant and teaching kitchen while living and working as a sous chef at the American Academy in Rome a couple years ago. Giovanni worked with trained chefs as well as dozens of interns and volunteers.

“I had been interested in developing a teaching kitchen before I went to Rome so when I heard about the program there it was a perfect fit,” he said. “My wife and I have had a longstanding dream of living abroad with our children so when the opportunity presented itself, we couldn’t say no.”

His parents came to Napa from Italy and opened a restaurant when he was a small boy so he grew up in a pizzeria. Living in Italy was a way for him to reconnect with his roots. Upon return he made his dream into reality. He took what he learned abroad and applied it in his new part profit, part non-profit creation.

The co-owners looked around and did a lot of research, finding out there are non-profit restaurants, but not ran the same way so it is creating a model for profit and non-profit establishments.

The interns are there for a three month program, 20 hours a week. Each intern is paid \$8.25 an hour. It cycles through interns based on need and if it has space, it can hire them. It is trying to reach an underserved demographic, in which young adults either want to cook for themselves or it is a desired career field.

Guerrero says the interns have a different objective every month in culinary crafts, whether it is making dressing, sauces or pasta. A lot can be taught in three months. The rotation gives others the opportunity to learn. In a couple of years, the majority of employees will have gone through the intern program.

“It is a great service teaching kids how to cook,” Guerrero said. “The kids got so much out of it; building confidence to make something out of nothing.”

Foodshed Pizza is committed to authentic production and more conscious consumption. It prepares meals based on locally sourced, seasonal ingredients. Everything it makes is from scratch. Guerrero comes up with the recipes and they are passed down to the interns.

He says it is rewarding to watch a kid cook who has never even seen an artichoke before. For him, this is a way to give back, teaching healthy eating and basic cooking skills to kids who may have not been taught at home.

“I love to cook at home. I have two small children and we cook together but so many children miss that growing up,” he said.

According to him, liking vegetables may depend on the way it is prepared. He has heard interns mention not liking or eating vegetables until working there because he/she only tried canned food. Preparing it unique ways is a new experience for some.

“I wasn’t familiar with different types of produce,” Jesus Guzman, 22 year old intern and Napa resident, said. “I never had healthy food choices before but now I am eating healthier since I started working here.”

Guzman says he eats vegetables now that he didn’t before. Because he has discovered new produce and various ways to prepare it, he eats greens on a daily basis.

“It has been a wonderful experience being an intern here,” he said. “I am creative in cooking and would like to expand my cooking skills.”

Guerrero says the feedback has been positive from interns and customers. He has seen highly motivated interns and others who were just not ready to make the commitment.

The goal of the owners is to keep growing in other areas. In the future it hopes that the restaurant can generate enough funds to pay for the internships. It wants to establish relationships with other restaurant, so it can work together to recruit jobs.

630 Airpark Road in Napa •

For info go to foodshedpizza.org or call 265-7760

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