

# Pushcart vendors offer quick food conveniently

By Sheri Metzler  
Emerald Contributor

If you feel you have no time in the day to sit down and eat, the various pushcart vendors scattered about Eugene offer a pleasant alternative.

Cookie Szakacs owns and operates the hot dog cart located on the corner of 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street. Szakacs has been selling hot dogs on that corner for five-and-a-half years. "It's interesting to talk to people out here. I get more gossip on this corner than in all of Eugene," Szakacs said.

The hot dog selling business is not as good as it used to be, though. Szakacs explained that people are changing their eating habits and becoming more health conscious. "It's killing my business," she said.

Szakacs works alone about 10

to 12 hours a day, including setting up the cart and taking it down. She said selling from a cart is a lot more difficult than having a shop. "It gets kind of cold in winter when you're freezing and trying to hold an umbrella. It also gets really hot in the summer," Szakacs said.

The hot dogs are prepared in the cart itself. Szakacs sells foot-long hot dogs for \$1.50 and regular ones for \$1. She also sells chips for 40 cents and soda for 60 cents. "Pop saves me," said Szakacs, indicating that hot dogs sales are not high. "I'm looking for a student to design a new cart and a new product, something that they want to buy and it's not hot dogs."

The best aspect of the pushcart vending business for Szakacs is the people. "I have a lot of friends," Szakacs said, smiling. "Even people who

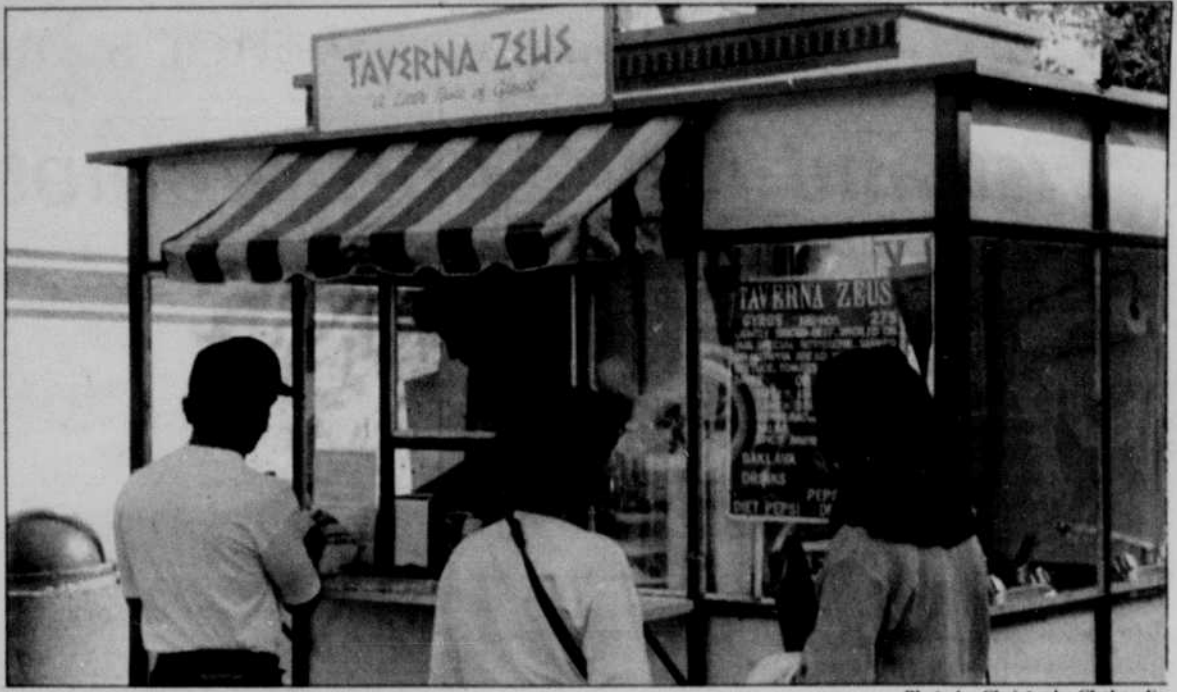


Photo by Christophe Chabaudie

**Taverna Zeus, a pushcart vendor located on the downtown mall, sells a variety of Greek food including baklava and gyros.**

graduate come back."

The Eugene downtown mall boasts different foods in its pushcarts. Taverna Zeus, "A Little Taste of Greece," offers customers the unique gyro. Proprietor and operator Marianne Rakestraw described the gyro as pita bread with slices of beef, lettuce, tomato, onion and tzatziki sauce, which is made out of cucumber and sour cream. Gyros sell for \$2.75 and baklava also is sold for \$1.

Rakestraw said working in the cart is easy. "Everything is so close and I don't have to go anywhere," she said.

Business is good most of the year, Rakeshaw explained, although it is slower in the winter. She likes being out in the mall where the people are. Taverna Zeus is located between Eugene Athletic and P. Blanton Finishing Touch, a women's clothing and accessories store.

Unlike Szakacs, who keeps her cart in her garage and

transports it every day, Rakestraw's cart stays on the mall and is insured against damage or theft.

Also on the downtown mall is the Fri-Jo Swedish pastry cart. A Fri-Jo is a pastry made out of yeast-raised dough fried in 100 percent vegetable oil and rolled in cinnamon. Owner Dottie Chase said, "I got the recipe from a Swedish family, but it's not a national dish."

According to Chase, business is better in the summer because kids are out of school. Business is usually good until New Year's because of all the promotions on the mall.

Fri-Jos has been on the mall year-round for 26 years. "I run my business like a business. You need to set a routine so people can depend on you. I don't want to disappoint my customers," Chase said.

Chase likes the location on the mall because of the influx of people. She gets a lot of her business from fairs and other special attractions. "The tran-

sient business is better. A Fri-Jo is a pick up and walk away item," Chase said.

Fri-Jos is located across from Taverna Zeus and faces east. It is open from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., six days a week.

Most pushcarts are going to remain in business despite winter being around the corner. Janice Bohman of the Eugene Development Department said four of the six carts that operated during the summer will continue to operate during the winter. "The businesses that sell warm things will be staying," Bohman said.

Rates for pushcarts on the mall in winter drop 50 percent of what they are in summer. Vendors pay \$20 to \$70 a month during the winter, depending upon the number of items sold.

Szakacs' hot dog cart will remain on the corner near the University bookstore throughout the winter. Both Taverna Zeus and Fri-Jo's will also remain open through winter.



Photo by Christophe Chabaudie

**Many shoppers on the downtown mall enjoy the convenience and quickness of pushcart vendors.**

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