Marc Gutshall, Three Forks' front manager/cook

Not Rocket Science

Three Forks makes big happy food for everyone

BY SUZI STEFFEN

You choose your protein. You choose your vegetables. You choose your condiments, and you get to say if you want little sprinkles on top at the end. Then the fast-moving people behind the counter get to work.

But this ain't no Subway: It's Three Forks, a made-to-order pan-Asian fresh food quick-wok-Mongolian-barbecue-style-except-with-homemade-sauces joint that's speedier than formal but more contemplative (and far, far better tasting) than fast food places. Owners Erika Condof and Jeremy Copperman started Three Forks as a food cart while they were undergrads, Condof getting chemistry and women's studies degrees from OSU and Copperman a degree in physics from the UO. They expanded to "the big events around town," Condof says, at the suggestion of another food cart owner.

Since the beginning, Copperman and Condof have served vegans, vegetarians and carnivores alike. "It's not quite as much food for vegetarians, but it's really close!" Condof says. I definitely remember feeling a brand of vegetarian-specific relief seeing the Three Forks offerings like the famous "hippie bowl" at Alton Baker or Secret House. The hippie bowl mixes healthy grains and vegetables and insanely good sauces with the protein of your choice (I'm all about the soy, but I've watched meat-eaters rip into their meals with glee). So a storefront on Willamette, in the middle of fast food hell, gets a definite hurrah. The move to the permanent structure occurred in April 2006, Condof said, because she got pregnant, "so my medical school and Jeremy's Ph.D. in physics would have to wait for a while."

Now they're expecting a second child, and Condof laughs at their logic about not going back to school. "I don't know what we were thinking — that the restaurant would be less work?"

They put in long hours both at home and at the restaurant, but it's a labor of love. Along with a friend, Travis McMahon, Copperman created the menu from scratch. The sauces come from Copperman's background: His two grandmothers, one from Arkansas and one from Hawaii, inspired him to invent

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