

What's for Dinner?

Looking to the future of food with some of Eugene's visionaries BY ADRIENNE VAN DER VALK

When a community boasts as many diverse and high-quality dining and food-shopping options as Eugene, it's easy to become spoiled. It's also easy to become complacent, repetitive and stuck in a culinary rut, especially if the old favorites don't change much over time. But successful food businesses and programs don't become that way by sticking to a rigid formula. *EW* set out to find out what some of our local "foodies" see as the most important shifts in practices and values coming over the gastronomic horizon.

ED KING: Owner, King Estate Winery

"The consumers are ahead of the providers in terms of locally grown, organic, seasonal food," Ed King says when reflecting on culinary trends. "The consumer is ahead of the grocery store; Market of Choice didn't invent a category, they responded to a need. Who wants same-old, same-old out of a box from who knows where with who knows what sprayed on it?"

In addition to hundreds of acres of vines, King's property includes 45 acres of organic orchards and gardens for use in the estate's kitchen and marketplace. The commitment to knowing where food comes from is more than a business decision for King, who established the vineyard in 1991.

"From a philosophical point of view, I don't think I can overemphasize the importance of supporting local food systems," he says. "[Local farmers] live in this community. They drink the same water. They pay taxes here. They raise their families here."

The wine industry currently enjoys a special and successful place in the Eugene area agriculture market, according to King.

"Supporting local wine is good for tourism. We can appreciate the role local wineries play. Coming out here is a good reason for people to get out of town."

TOM BARKIN: Slow Food Eugene

Slow Food is an international organization designed to promote consumption of food that is "good, clean and fair."

Barkin notes that while "it has become the in-thing for corporate industries to use 'organic' as a marketing label," in fact most people don't have a clear idea of what it means to eat organic and locally. Slow Food educates the public through activities like community dinners and school initiatives. For Barkin, one of the timely issues surrounding his cause is minimizing barriers to shopping locally so that more people can reap the advantages.

"We have to do several things that are seemingly at odds with each other simultaneously," he explains. "We have to support the local food industry, but you have to make healthy food more affordable. You go to Saturday Market and it can be expensive to eat there. But farmers aren't getting rich; it is hard, demanding work and there are a lot of risks involved. If only the well-off can afford to eat like that, then we haven't accomplished our goal of reaching a healthier, more conscientious world. Building awareness of local farmers as their technology increases mean they can produce food more economically."

TOM KAMIS: Co-owner, Davis' Restaurant

"We set up to make sure we had good quality food at affordable prices," Kamis explains when asked about the philosophical base for the new downtown restaurant and lounge. For the Davis' three owners, providing choice meant not only offering diverse menu items but also experimenting with portion size.

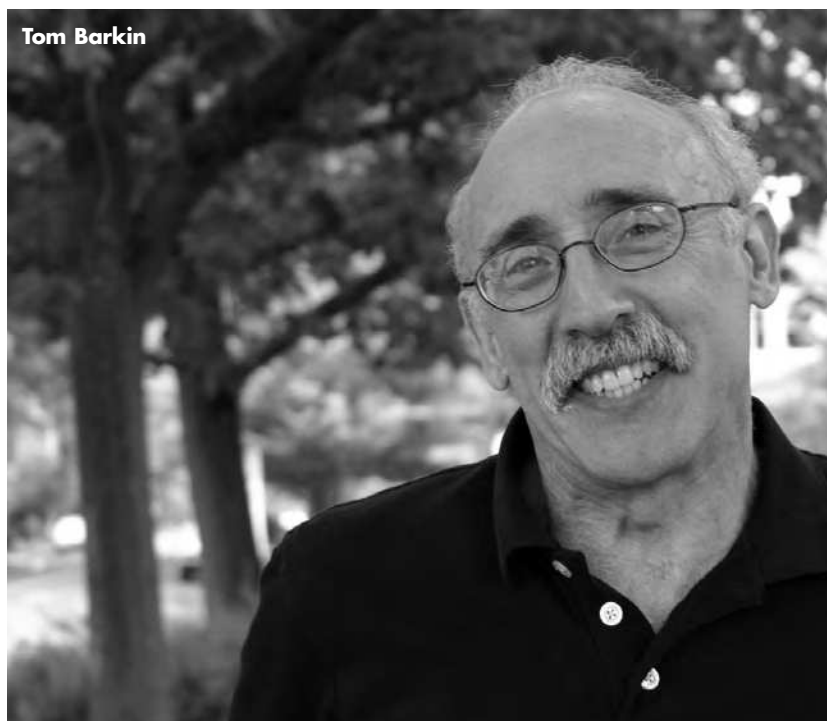
"Serving both full and half orders is a really good way to appeal to both ends of the spectrum. If you want a big, full meal, you'll pay a little more. But if you want to try some good food, you don't have to pay an arm and a leg. People don't want massive amounts of food. They want to eat reasonable amounts of good food."

Davis' staff was hired from the kitchens of Eugene's finer cafes and bistros, a choice Kamis says set high standards for the quality of their food from the beginning. He's hoping the establishment of a more upscale restaurant will not only satisfy their customers but also improve the neighborhood surrounding their Broadway and Olive location.

"The ultimate goal is to redefine dining downtown. Adam's Place has done good business for years. We want to take the other side of the blocks, the side that has a bad reputation."



Ed King



Tom Barkin



Tom Kamis



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