



An Indian Lunch

Leela's Kitchen offers Springfield diners a healthy option BY SHANNON FINNELL

LEELA NELAPUDI
PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Leela Nelapudi has always loved making delicious meals. "I cook every day," she says. "I love trying flavors, and I always cook healthy."

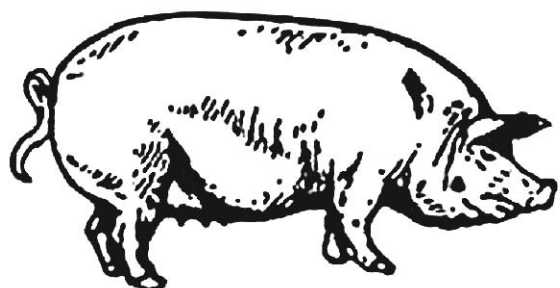
That passion is now blossoming in the commercial kitchen space at Sprout! in Springfield. Every weekday from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm, as well as during the 3 to 7 pm Friday Sprout! farmers market, Nelapudi serves up plates of Indian food that are healthy, vegetarian and delicious.

"I had an interest for a few years," she says, adding that the former owner of Evergreen Indian Restaurant, a friend, used to try to tempt her to work there. "They moved out of town, and I thought, 'My kids are all grown, and I don't have anything much to do, so maybe I can try something out,'" Nelapudi explains. "I happened to look on Craigslist and found Sprout! Kitchen."

In addition to its farmers market, Sprout! has a mission to help small food businesses get off the ground. Nelapudi cooks in a section of the 3,000-square-foot commercial kitchen, making meals that vary slightly every day. "The basic food is rice and dahl, which is curried lentils, and yogurt salad," she says. "Those two things are always there, but the vegetable changes every day." And the list of veggies is long: eggplant, okra, asparagus, spinach, potatoes, cauliflower and cabbage, just for starters.

"I always had a desire to provide a healthy option for people eating out — and a different flavor that's not American," Nelapudi says. She cooks with a mix of homemade spices, primarily made of red chili peppers, cumin, coriander, mustard and turmeric. "It's from the state where I'm from, Andhra Pradesh," she says. "It's very authentic to my little area there." ■

Check out Leela's Kitchen 11:30 am to 1:30 pm Monday through Friday as well as during the 3 to 7 pm Friday Sprout! farmers market, 418 A St., Springfield; 228-8327.



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