

Wisdom

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is only 60-years-old, Anderson said, in large part due to diabetes and associated ailments, obesity and poor diet. Anderson's father and both grandmothers had diabetes, and now he is among those at risk of the disease.

Most people and most health professionals believed that once you developed diabetes, you were stuck with it. However, in a series of studies—Dr. Neal Barnard, founder and president of Washington D.C.-based Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), reveals it is possible to reverse type 2 diabetes as well as repair insulin function, control blood sugar and reducing the need for medication.

The cure is a low-fat vegan diet.

control, cholesterol reduction, weight control, and kidney function. Vegan and vegetarian diets are consistently associated with lower rates of diabetes, heart disease, and being overweight, another PCRM scientific review stated.

The Food for Life program rejects processed and animal-based foods including meat, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy and instead promotes a "power plate" built on whole grains, vegetables, legumes and fruits.

blood pressure, and an improvement in self-esteem." He lost 20 pounds.

As you become more aware and careful about what you put in your body, Anderson said, this also reduces the trend toward substance abuse.

Anderson recommends Dr. Barnard's book *Reversing Diabetes* as a must for diabetes prevention coordinators and for anyone interested in overcoming the disease.

The Food for Life program is ideal for Native populations, said Anderson. Historically, meat was a small part of the diet for many tribes. He said a plant-based diet not only improves health, but ties into food sovereignty, allowing Natives to reclaim their health and traditions at the same time.

"Because many tribal communities don't have access to fresh produce, whole grains and legumes, we must grow our own, and that is the path to re-affirming the ancestral ways of living with seasons and within natural cycles," said Anderson. "Surely this will promote mental and spiritual health as well."

Pills and shots were not traditional methods for treating disease among Native cultures.

Indigenous people did not have a big distinction between food and medicine, said Anderson. "Food was the medicine," said Anderson, "Today we have two separate entities-- we need the medicine because the food we eat is making us sick."

Anderson has been trying out new recipes, and making cooking with plant-based foods training videos with chefs Frank and Whitewater. "We hope to disseminate copies of a DVD to every Indian Health clinic in the United States," he said. They plan to have copies dispersed to Native peoples as well.

The trio will present cooking demonstrations at tribal communities and conferences including the Native Foods and Health Symposium, April 26-27 at Muscogee (Creek) Nation for the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative.

"I believe we're at the forefront of a great transformation as we realize the wisdom of our ancestors," said Anderson, "And I hold lots of hope that many will follow."

"Returning to an ancestral plant-based diet is a way to reclaim our health," said Frank, who has spent over 20 years documenting the foods and life ways of Native American communities throughout the Southwest. Her Food for Life recipes include meals like the Three Sisters' Sauté, Tortillas de Maís, Blue Corn Posole Mush, and Mixed Berry and Apple Fruit Compote.

A vegan or vegetarian diet is not only beneficial to humans; it's more sustainable than the average American meat-based diet, according to a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. A meat-based food system requires more energy, land, and water resources than the lacto-ovo-vegetarian (without meat) diet, the authors stated in the report comparing both diets effects on the environment.

Anderson is by no means a perfect eater, but as he gets older, he said staying slim and keeping his sugar levels down is important. "What you eat is powerful," he said.

Anderson concludes, "I believe that if we can grow our own food, generate our own renewable energy, protect our natural resources and promote sustainable living, that we will also benefit physically, emotionally, spiritually and economically while becoming connected to Mother Earth again."

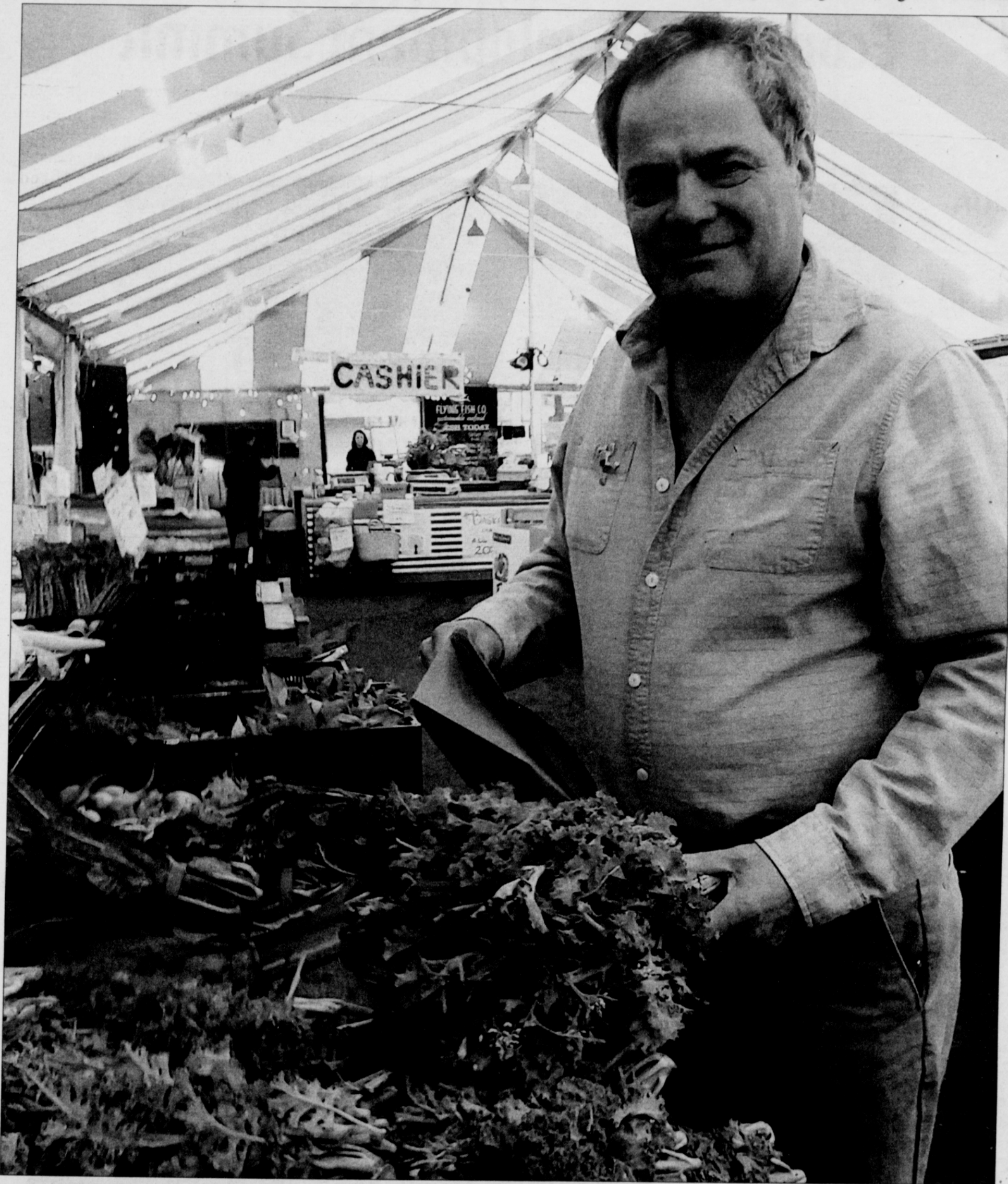


PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Marc Anderson, 60, a descendent of Oklahoma Seminole Chief Billy Bowlegs, shops at a local produce market to keep with his recently discovered low-fat diet. He's replaced fatty, sugary processed foods with high-nutrient foods Native communities once harvested like corn, beans, vegetables, fruits, nuts and grains.

Americans' unhealthy microwave and drive-through diet of fatty, sugary processed foods has replaced the low-fat and high-nutrient foods Native communities once harvested like corn, beans, vegetables, fruits, nuts and grains.

Before colonialism, Native ancestors never had diabetes. But today the disease is poisoning their descendants. According to the Indian Health Service, American Indians and Alaska Natives die of diabetes at a rate of 177 percent higher than other Americans.

Barnard and Caroline Trapp, PCRM's director of diabetes education, developed a nutrition program, Food for Life, specifically to reverse Types 2 diabetes among Native populations.

"Halting the alarming rate and progression of diabetes among Native Americans requires radical changes in lifestyle, with changes in diet at the forefront," said Trapp.

A PCRM study revealed participants on a low-fat vegan diet showed dramatic improvement in four disease markers: blood sugar

Anderson has been supporting the program, which uses food recipes from southwestern Native chef and food historian, Lois Ellen Frank, and Diné chef Walter Whitewater of the Navajo Nation, for the past year and a half. He changed his diet to vegan a year ago, though today, he eats salmon on occasion.

Three weeks into his new diet, Anderson said he began to experience a change "in taste buds and cravings, as well as a feeling of empowerment over your health, reductions in blood sugar, cholesterol, weight and