

SHARING THE BOUNTY

LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE



Slow Food
Roaring Fork

Slow Food Roaring Fork promotes good, clean, fair food

BY JEANNE MCGOVERN

When Simon & Garfunkel implored us to “slow down, you move too fast ...,” they might have been on to something.

At least that’s what the 80,000 Slow Foodies around the globe would say.

Founded in 1982 in Italy in protest of the fast-growing, fast-food lifestyle, Slow Food is an international, nonprofit food movement. Its *conviviums*—or chapters—can be found in more than 100 countries ... and right here at home. Slow Food Roaring Fork was inaugurated in March 2004, one of approximately 150 *conviviums* in the United States.

“When traveling in Italy, one can’t help but notice the strong presence of Slow Food. While working at the Cooking School [of Aspen], many of us shared the same viewpoints about food. We all came together one night in my tiny apartment, over a seafood boule and drinking a Vermentino, and agreed to start a chapter,” says Joyce Falcone, who co-founded Slow Food Roaring Fork, or SFRF, with friends and fellow food lovers Katie Leonaitis, David K. Gibson and Tom Passavant.

The local organization’s goal—like its international brethren—is simple, according to founding member Passavant: promoting food that is good, clean and fair. “Good’ meaning supporting and promoting heritage and heirloom products that Slow Food started out trying to preserve, as well as promoting eating slowly and convivially with others,” says Passavant. “Clean’ food is food that is sustainable or organic and produced for a fair wage for farmers.”

Members also want to provide education to children and adults through the organization’s programs.

“We want to educate adults and children on how food is grown, how taste develops and to encourage them to eat foods that are grown locally,” says Leonaitis. “Our biggest project is working in the school. Our goal, long-term, is to have gardens in all the schools in the valley.”

Another significant component of its mission is “to encourage everyone to savor the pleasures of the table in a slow and enjoyable manner.”

Case in point: *Convivium* is derivative of a Latin word that means, “to live with hence to feast with.” SFRF takes that heritage seriously; every local event—such as the Fall Harvest Social Fundraiser, hosted by Mark Fischer at Six89 in Carbondale, and a series of smaller dinners at local restaurants—is a feast of local produce and a great chance to connect with fellow community members.

“I have long been committed to the idea of Slow Food,” says Fischer, who has set the bar for valley restaurants with his dedication to creating dishes with locally grown foods at Six89 and his most recent venture,



Left to right Joyce Falcone, Tom Passavant and Katie Leonaitis.

Photo courtesy of Karen Glenn

Carbondale’s Phat Thai. “We have really embraced the idea of using local, sustainably grown food.”

More important to Fischer, though, is creating memorable meals—the crux of living life in the Slow Food lane.

“A Slow Food event is always a guarantee of a unique dining experience. Chefs and food producers alike all try to feature local products in the best light,” notes Leonaitis adding that most of the funds raised at SFRF events go toward purchasing supplies and materials for the Slow Food Children’s Tasting Garden at the Aspen Community Garden and the new gardens at the Aspen School District Campus.

And while SFRF operates independently on a grassroots level, it works with Slow Food USA to participate in seed exchanges and receive guidance. Last year, for example, Leonaitis incorporated heirloom seed varieties like Tennis Ball Lettuce and Amish Paste Tomatoes in the tasting garden and school programs.

Looking to the future, Falcone hopes that Aspen will become the first *CittaSlow* or “Slow City” in the United States. The *CittaSlow* movement is linked to the Slow Food movement, but extends from food to all aspects of life. For example, to become a *CittaSlow*, a city must have less than 55,000 residents and meet six criteria that assess things like environmental policy and community values.

“I believe that Aspen has a real chance at becoming the first U.S. Slow City, due to our green policies, environmental policies, natural beauty, lack of billboard and neon signs and high quality of life,” says Falcone.

To become a member of Slow Food Roaring Fork, sign up online at www.slowfoodroaringfork.org. 🌱

Jeanne McGovern is an editor at The Aspen Times and mother of two children. She hopes this will be the year when she, too, is finally able to enjoy life, food and family more slowly.

(Additional reporting by Cat Leonaitis)



GROWING A NEW GENERATION OF SLOW FOODIES

Everyone knows kids love to dig in the dirt. So why, then, is the idea of a child planting a garden—and enjoying the fruits of his or her labor—so foreign to most Americans?

The most likely answer is our affection for fast food, right down to the processed foods that are plopped in piles on our children's school lunch trays.

Not anymore—at least not locally.

Slow Food Roaring Fork has committed itself to sharing with Aspen schoolchildren the healthful benefits of homegrown, organic foods, and it is committed to showing these children how to make the same thing happen right at home.

The learning begins at the Slow Food Children's Tasting Garden at the Aspen Community Garden, where preschoolers and elementary school kids have for years visited to learn about—and enjoy—the benefits of a day spent farming.

"The kids always do a three-part program [at the tasting garden]. They do some work, some learning and some eating," says Katie Leonaitis, co-founder of Slow Food Roaring Fork. "We try to make a salad or something fun with the fresh produce."

The lesson continues back at school, thanks to a new garden right on the Aspen School District Campus.

Installed last fall in cooperation with the Aspen School Lunch Initiative, the six 16'x3' garden beds will be planted this year with such offerings as spinach, mixed greens, potatoes, carrots, peas, corn, beans, squash, strawberries and asparagus. The bounty will hopefully show up on students' lunch trays in fall 2008—all with the goal of having kids learn where their food comes from while enjoying a healthy, fresh-from-the-earth meal.

But the studies don't end here. Slow Food Roaring Fork wants to instill the slow food mentality into schoolchildren by creating a complete cycle: Food grown in the garden will be served in school lunches, and the vegetable waste will be composted and returned to the garden through an "Earth Tub" kids can toss their food into.

The movement is part of a philosophy changeover in local lunchrooms. In fact, the Aspen School Lunch Initiative and the Aspen-based Children's Health Foundation Initiative are actively coordinating a "whole systems" approach to teaching kids about healthy lifestyles—from the garden to the classroom.

"Research indicates that a diet rich in whole food substantially improves attention span, learning ability and physical well-being of schoolchildren," says Mardell Burkholder, executive director of the Children's Health Foundation.

It is a way of learning—and living—that Slow Food Roaring Fork organizers hope will serve as a role model for schools across the valley and the country. —JM

Photo courtesy of Katie Leonaitis



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Visit www.slowfoodnation.org for more information.

Slow Food Nation is a subsidiary organization of Slow Food USA, a registered 501(c)3.