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Taking Root

By Sophie Braccini



Cindy Kastner prepares meals in the Back to the Table production kitchen Photo provided

Cindy Kastner wants to help people obtain a healthy lifestyle through food and expand her reach to people who particularly need a healthy diet, those recovering from heart surgery or cancer. In July she launched Taking Root - a dedicated cooking and delivery service of plant-based meals in Lafayette. The businesswoman, who is both a health coach and passionate cook, makes delicious and healthy combinations of entrees and sides that are good for everybody. Kastner also works with people who have special gluten-free, salt-free or oil-free dietary needs.

"I first discovered the benefits of eating organics in a nutrition class during my college years," remembers Kastner. "I was too far along in my studies to switch to becoming a nutritionist, but it made me change the way I ate." This translated into a whole organic pantry as she raised three children in Lafayette. "People would come to my house and ask me why everything was organic in my kitchen," she remembers with a smile.

When her children left the house for college, Kastner decided to further her understanding of food and health. She took a year-long training at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition and became a certified holistic health coach. "At the beginning of the class we were told that it would change our lives," she remembers. "I was somewhat doubtful, but it did. When I came out of it I was a completely different person." During the class Kastner learned about the benefits of different diets including the plant-based diet coming out of "The China Study" research, that claims that most, if not all, of the degenerative diseases that afflict us can be controlled, or even reversed, by rejecting our present menu of animal-based and processed foods.

Kastner first stopped eating dairy, then all animal products. But she is not dogmatic. "I learned at the Institute that everyone has their own diet and figures out what is good for themselves," she adds. "As long as they are unprocessed, whole foods, with good quality, you're on the right track."

Kastner started her practice as a health coach, primarily supporting and guiding clients toward their nutrition goals. But people started asking her to cook for them. She had always loved to cook, collecting hundreds of recipes, and took it to the next level with a professional plant-based culinary training with the Rouxbe Cooking School. "My practice started evolving from people's requests, and now, with this new business, I feel that I am at the right place, I have taken root and I am growing," she adds with a warm smile.

Paula Roemer has been Kastner's client for some time. The Walnut Creek dentist got Kastner's name from her chiropractor. "What I like about Cindy (Kastner) is that she cooks exactly the way I would," comments the busy mother of four. "She puts so much love into her meal preparation." Roemer thinks using all organic ingredients is a plus, but what she likes best, besides the convenience, is the freshness, creativity and taste of the meals she buys for her family. "I started eating a plant-based diet four years ago for health reasons, and also for the impact on the environment," she says, "but I am not rigid about it; I don't want to offend family and friends when we are invited." Her children feel the same: they love the plant-based food, but also get other types

of food outside the house. Taking Root allows them to get the quality of food they want, without sweating it.

The business model is pretty simple. Each Wednesday a new menu comes out, which includes five entrées and five sides. Clients have until Friday to place an order. They either order six, eight or 12 meals, or à la carte. "If you order six meals you can mix and match, depending if you want to feed six people for one day, or two for three days," explains Kastner. She goes shopping for her organic ingredients on Mondays at the Berkeley Bowl, Diablo Foods or Whole Foods. She takes everything to the Lafayette production kitchen "Back to the Table" and prepares all the meals for Tuesday deliveries. All orders are contained in large mason jars.

An example of an entrée would be a barbecue tempeh with slaw and ranch dressing, or a rice pilaf with carrots and crunchy pasta; sides can include a quinoa salad with sugar snap peas, scallions and mint, or a lentil salad with roasted beets. Also on the menu is Kastner's anytime bar made with nuts, dried fruits and maple syrup.

Kastner feels she also has a mission to support people who are in recovery. "I want people who are going into surgery, heart patients, cancer patients, to be able to feed themselves in a way that's good for them," she says. For more information and to order online, visit www.takingrootsf.com.

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