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Washington boasts a cornucopia of celebrity chefs—as well as a plethora of exceptional eateries—and **thrive!** is on a mission to bring you a favorite **HEALTHY** recipe each issue. For our Fall issue, we visit the beautiful Methow Valley...

Local No. 98856

by Katherine Jaeger

Tess Hoke begins a July morning in her garden, digging up a batch of small new potatoes from a half-acre lot abundant with herb and flower beds, fruit trees, berry patches and vegetable beds. Three hours later, those potatoes have been turned into salad and are being eaten just 50 feet from the ground in which they were grown. A grower who lives down the road stops by to see if Tess has any use for a case of peaches or a flat of ripe tomatoes, while from the kitchen wafts the aroma of a dozen cherry pies. It sounds like an idyllic, secluded scene, but amidst these pepper plants and lush lettuces, a quiet revolution is taking place.

Welcome to **Local No. 98856**: part restaurant, part fruit stand, part education center, part neighborhood hangout. Since it opened in the summer of 2005 in the Methow Valley town of Twisp, Local No. 98856 (the name refers to the town's zip code) has been celebrating the joy of eating organic, locally-grown food, as well as emphasizing the importance of supporting community agriculture. Passersby occasionally stop and stare at the restaurant's industrial-looking sign, wondering if the old-fashioned building is a union office. They're not far off the mark.

"It's a union of community," says owner Tess, who worked as a farmer for 10 years in the Methow Valley before opening the restaurant with chef **Deanna Leuschen**. Together they have created an epicenter of community consciousness and sustainability, which draws in small growers and suppliers, as well as a faithful coterie of local diners.

This devotion to community and sustainability goes, literally, to the foundation of the restaurant. The building that houses Local No. 98856, designed and built in an eclectic style by

craftsman **Doug Potter**, is made entirely of reclaimed materials, primarily lumber from an east coast Safeway built in the early 1900s. What goes on within the building is similarly resourceful. Not a scrap of food is wasted; what cannot be served is made into stock or turned into mulch or compost. Tess, aware of the impact of disposable, single-serving packaging on the environment, even found a supplier of forks, spoons and cups made from a biodegradable corn product. Suppliers deliver their products on a daily basis: grass-fed, hormone-free meat comes from **Tri-River Meats** in nearby Tonasket. **The Methow Creamery** provides raw milk and dairy products, and a variety of whole grains comes from **Bluebird's Grain Farm** in neighboring Mazama.

The dining area features a walk-in fridge holding the day's offerings, a small produce section with fruits and vegetables for sale by the pound, and numerous tables where regulars gather to have coffee and chat. At the counter one can order bakery items, organic espresso or the ever-popular fresh fruit smoothies. From the deli case one can select from eight ever-changing salads (the roasted turkey salad with fresh tarragon and garbanzo beans is the current bestseller), and at least seven sandwiches, including several rotating specials. Soup is served in the winter, and vegetarian and vegan options are always available. Depending on what the garden yields, other items might pop up to surprise: crunchy cucumber salad, Asian-spiced spring rolls or fresh strawberry milkshakes.

A chef by heritage rather than formal training, Deanna learned to cook from her grandmother, a Portuguese immigrant who owned a bakery, a deli and an orchard in California. Also a licensed massage practitioner, Deanna feels honored to be able to nourish people

“inside and out”, and she takes care of their insides with her spicy bean salad, curried squash soup, fresh fruit salsa and house-roasted turkey sandwiches. She loves to add an ethnic flair to her cooking whenever possible, in part to express her own culinary heritage and in part to buck the popular misconception that healthy food must taste bland.

Whether or not the way to the heart is through the stomach, Tess believes the way to the head is, and it is a joy for her to educate people while feeding them. In a world of big-box stores, it is hard to remember that carrots actually have to *grow somewhere*, and *someone* has to grow and harvest them. It is this disconnection from our food that Tess and Deanna want to address.

Before industrialization enabled quick transportation of foods, both within the country and from abroad, food production was by necessity restricted to local sources, and each “cog” (farmers, grocers, butchers, etc.) had a specific function. The twentieth century saw the rise of so-called agribusinesses, farming corporations which typically transport a limited variety of products over long distances. With the current focus on organic food and the global effects of long-distance transportation, “there is a movement happening where all these food cogs are being re-established,” says Tess. The atmosphere at Local No. 98856 is designed to make the customer aware of these cogs. Cards on the tables list the origins of the day’s produce, and the distance each item traveled to get to the plate. An open-air event space allows people to dine among the flower and vegetable beds, and to see where the lettuce and tomatoes in their salad were grown. In these ways, Tess and Deanna seek to establish a small, self-sustaining agricultural and economic apparatus, even at the cost of their own convenience.

With only six other employees, running a restaurant seven days a week is a constant challenge for the two women. Whereas a conventional restaurant would have a delivery truck pull up to its door every few days, supplying pre-packaged products, the employees at Local No. 98856 must harvest, sort and process everything themselves, and the menu on any given day is subject to the whim of the growing season. The summer harvest involves a mad rush to process and preserve foods (much is frozen for use during the winter), as well as to create fresh, interesting dishes every day. They are spurred on by the satisfaction of supporting the agricultural workers in their community, through the purchase and promotion of their goods.

When asked what advice she had for individuals who want to eat locally and support community agriculture, Tess says we must seek it out, in spite of the extra effort required, by shopping at farmers’ markets and patronizing businesses that provide and promote local foods. Deanna encourages individuals to buy a planter box for their patio or windowsill, throw out those ancient dried herbs in the back of the cupboard, and not be afraid to try something new in the kitchen.

“In our modern Western mindset, we think that if it doesn’t come in a box or through a to-go window, it must be hard,” she says. Considering the long-term effects that our food choices can have on our own health, the environment and local economic viability, do we really have any excuse to shrink from the effort, especially when it can take such a tasty form?

The guiding premise of Local No. 98856 is that of any grassroots organization: the belief that by narrowing your focus to the level of the community and the individual, you can change the world. The people of Local No. 98856 are

doing so by buying their eggs down the street, by tending their herb garden, and by opening their customers’ eyes to the joys of fresh food and growing things.

“Good food is good *for* you,” says Deanna—and a visit to Local No. 98856 can show you just how good it is!

EMMER COFFEE CAKE

2 1/2 Cups Emmer Flour* or Wheat Flour
1 Cup Sugar
2 Teaspoons Baking Soda
1/2 Teaspoon Salt
2 Eggs
1/2 Cup Canola Oil
2 Cups Applesauce

Topping:

1/4 Cup Brown Sugar, packed
1/4 Cup Walnuts, chopped
1/4 Cup Butter, melted

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.
Grease a 9x9-inch baking dish.

In a large mixing bowl, mix the flour, white sugar, baking soda and salt. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs. Stir eggs, oil and applesauce into the dry mixture. Pour into the greased pan. Mix the brown sugar, walnuts and melted butter; spoon the mixture over the batter.

Bake on the middle rack of the oven for 30 to 40 minutes, until the cake is golden brown and a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Allow to cool slightly before serving.

**Emmer flour, from a wheat-like grain, can be found at specialty markets and grain shops. Wheat flour can be substituted.*

Local No. 98856 is located at 1017 Methow Valley Highway East, Twisp, WA 98856 (South of the Methow Bridge on Highway 20) —509-997-0978.