

## **Killing the corn dog**

Healthy kids' food on the menu at local restaurants

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A line of organic kids' fare heads out toward the tables at the Palace Restaurant. The Palace joined a growing number of local restaurants recently and revamped its children's menu./Photo by Stephen Eginoire

by **Jen Reeder**

Sixteen months ago, when their daughter, Allegra, was born, life changed for Palace Restaurant owners Paul Gelose and Carolyn Lamb. When she was about six months old and began eating solid food, the new parents turned a more critical eye on the kids' menu at the restaurant, which featured traditional fare like corn dogs and chicken nuggets.

"We'd go down to the restaurant and literally the only thing that I felt like I could feed her was avocados," Lamb says. "We thought, 'should we be looking at better choices overall for kids'"

Then, when Allegra was about 10 months old, she developed an allergy to cheese, breaking out in hives and having difficulty breathing.

"It was scary," Lamb recalls. "That made us start thinking, 'Gosh, there's so many kids out there with allergies to something.'"

So the couple charged their executive chef, Adam Bergtold, with creating a healthy children's menu.

After working with vendors to find as much organic and locally sourced food as possible, the new menu launched last month.

"We had a lot of fun playing with the menu," Bergtold says. "It was kind of hard to piece it together at first, but now that we've got it rolling, it's nice and smooth. We get a lot of comments on the new menu – quite a few of the parents that come in are kind of shocked that we have organic products on the kids' menu, so that's pretty cool."

The new menu – in a playful, kid-friendly font – features a range of \$6 options, with symbols denoting vegetarian and/or gluten-free items like a grilled veggie burger or organic peanut butter and jelly sandwich with bread from Sundown Bakery in Ignacio. Side options include sweet potato fries and sustainably farmed green beans sautéed with olive oil. The popular organic chicken tenders come fried (in non-trans fat oil) or grilled. Meatballs for the pasta (gluten-free rice noodles available on request) are made in-house with all-natural beef

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"It's fun trying to find local ingredients, trying to keep it all local," Bergtold says.

"All the feedback we've had is good."

North Main's Yellow Carrot has been offering healthy options for families since opening its doors in December 2009.

"Everything we do is homemade," says owner Sari Brown. "And we make everything every single day."

But about eight months ago, Brown updated the menu to address the growing demand for gluten-free food. She says it “touched my heart” to see kids with gluten-free diets gazing longingly at the tempting cupcakes they couldn’t eat.

“There are so many gluten-free children and dairy-free children now, and we cater to those people,” she says. “I have hundreds and hundreds of gluten-free clients. Everything that we offer can be done gluten-free.”

Some gluten-free desserts at the Yellow Carrot include double fudge brownies with white chocolate and dark chocolate caramel, and chocolate chip toffee pecan cookies. Her most popular gluten-free entrée is probably the shepherd’s pie, though the lemon basil chicken with broccoli and red grape quinoa, or shrimp and beef pad thai are also contenders.

“Gluten-free people come in here and have a heyday,” Brown says. “I sell more gluten-free cupcakes than I do regular cupcakes.”

Brown uses James Ranch beef and organic vegetables when they’re available, and makes all sauces and creams from scratch.

“That’s the thing about our food – it’s healthy because it’s homemade,” she says. “It’s not just that it’s healthy: it makes you feel good.”

The Cyprus Café has had a reputation for healthy food since it opened 15 years ago, and the kids’ menu has reflected that from the start. Owner Alison Dance says it was an easy decision.

“We want to feed people local, natural, good food, so why wouldn’t we do that for our kids? It just makes sense,” she says.

With plenty of vegetarian items (a large component of the Mediterranean diet), the kids’ menu at the Cyprus includes a smoked cheddar sandwich on pita bread, hummus with pita and carrots, and a chicken breast with sautéed vegetables and noodles. The butter is organic, the chicken is free range, and the cheese is natural.

“It’s clean, it’s what kids like, and it’s reasonable,” Dance says.

It was important for Dance to strike a balance between health and taste, she says.

“I grew up when all the hippies were having these health food restaurants,” she says. “You’d go in and eat at them, and it might have been good for you, but it sure didn’t taste very good. I want it to taste good, and I want it to be good for you – you can do both.” •



The Palace Restaurant’s executive chef, Adam Bergtore, fires it up in the kitchen. Bergtore created the Palace’s new kids’ menu./Photo by Stephen Eginore

