

FEATURED

Healthy Eating Takes Neighborhood by Storm!

By Lauren Smith, Valley Brook Post 8 hrs ago



Chef Tim Ka from “The Hollow Log,” as he prepares their famous mushroom bruschetta. “The Hollow Log” is just one of almost a dozen new restaurants to open this year with a focus on healthy eating, local sourcing, and organic ingredients.

Valley Brook, N.Y. – For years local residents have complained that they needed to go off to surrounding cities to get access to a wide selection of healthy eating choices. But over the past year, ten--yes, ten--new restaurants have moved into the area with a focus on healthy, sustainable, and local eating. “I used to rely on picking up food

after work, downtown, before coming home. The restaurants here just did not care about health and longevity,” said Brian Karr, a local accountant and health enthusiast.

Other residents we interviewed had similar feelings. “This isn’t the 1970’s anymore, we want thoughtful, natural, healthy ways to eat that don’t involve me picking things from my garden after work,” said Judy Fisher, who owns a car dealership and has her own healthy eating podcast. She explained that a trip to the doctor three years ago made it clear that the normal style of eating out in Valley Brook was taking years off of her life. She started eating more at home, but her work made that a difficult lifestyle. “I work more than twelve hours per day, if I have to cook from scratch as well, it’s just unmanageable.” So Judy started her local restaurant podcast, which has over 12,000 subscribers now, and which many credit as part of the reason for the influx of healthy restaurants.



“The Salad Shooter” is just one of the new Valley Brook restaurants serving food that focuses as much on health as it does on taste.

“I had been a chef at a top New York City restaurant and commuted to visit family in Valley Brook on the weekends. But after discovering the popularity of Judy’s food podcast, I realized I could start the first healthy and organic restaurant in town, and

already have a customer base hungry for what I was making,” explained chef Kim Samuelson, of “The Salad Shooter,” the first of the new wave of healthy restaurants in town. Several other chefs also credited Ms. Fisher with building the audience to prove that their healthy-cooking skills had a welcoming home in Valley Brook. The demand for healthy food has even expanded beyond just entrees. Valley Brook recently got its first healthy desert shop--the “Bouncing Lemon” Frozen Yogurt shop, which has been packed after school almost every day for the six weeks since it opened.



“Bouncing Lemon” frozen yogurt, the first healthy dessert choice in a raft of new eating options that have arrived in our town.

“Our teachers tell us that too much fat and sugar isn’t good for us,” said Jessica Ahn, a freshman at Valley Brook High School. She explained that several students had made a chat group about healthy places to spend time after school. “There just weren’t many good options; we would go to the ice cream place, or the ‘Crazy Cupcake Factory’ which is cool sometimes, but most of the time we couldn’t find anywhere healthy. And then “Bouncing Lemon” opened up, and we just end up going there every day now!”

Parents were similarly enthusiastic, and praised the yogurt shop, but wondered why it took so long, and why there are still so few options.

Where are these places coming from?

With the raft of new restaurants, Ms. Fisher wondered aloud on her podcast how all these highly trained chefs and restaurateurs decided to come to a relatively small town like Valley Brook, NY. Some chefs, like Samuelson, had already been commuting to the town regularly to see family. But other chefs seemed to come out of nowhere. We interviewed the executive chefs of several of the new establishments, and in most cases, they came because they saw a strong market opportunity. Many of the new restaurateurs had been working as junior and senior chefs at larger, established restaurants in surrounding cities. They had been interested in new opportunities, and at first Valley Brook did not look like an opportunity at all--it has eight restaurants close in the past 18 months. Yet demographically, the number of young families had been increasing, and they *should* spell a increasing demand. Several of the chefs speculated that the issue wasn't a drop in demand that caused the failures, but the kind of demand. They visited the town, spoke to residents, and in some cases, even commissioned a formal market research study to understand the demand for different types of cuisine. The results were clear--Valley Brook wanted more food, but it had to be healthy, sustainable, and local.

"After I got the results of the interviews, it become a no-brainer," said chef Catherine Sellen, of the new "Life Pizza," a vegan, whole-food pizza shop that had to extend its business hours because, "people just kept coming" as Sellen put it.

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