

# Customers come in for landing at Fly By Diner

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Once a month, Jan Findlater hops a plane to somewhere exploring different cultures, different cities and different foods.

The rest of the month, she and partner Sarah Tomsic fly in an 8-foot-by-15-foot trailer crammed with a six-burner SurFire gas stove, full-size stainless fridge, three-bay sink and small freezer.



Sarah Tomsic, a partner in Fly By Diner, makes cookies in the trailer Wednesday in the employee parking lot of Advanced Energy as she and partner Jan Findlater get ready to serve lunch. (V. Richard Haro/The Associated Press)

Small stainless cans with clear lids stuck to the side of the refrigerator hold cayenne pepper, dried mustard, cinnamon, basil and exotic chili powders; wire baskets hung overhead overflow with oven mitts, plastic wrap, pots and pans, spatulas and spoons.

The black-and-white checkerboard floor space is barely wide enough for the two to pass without turning sideways.

This is gourmet on the go, the home of Fly By Diner, a restaurant on wheels that serves fresh, gourmet food.

"It's roach coach gone Chanel," Tomsic said while stuffing bright red roasted peppers with goat cheese and herbs for the Symphony Soiree later that night.

Fly By Diner is part of a growing national trend of mobile restaurants that provide good food fast and take to heart Alice Waters' slow-food movement.

They use local, organic products when possible, natural meats, cage-free eggs, no hydrogenated oils or high fructose corn syrup, they recycle religiously and all of their utensils and containers are compostable.

Buying local and using compostable containers can be hard on a business because it adds about 50 cents per person, Findlater said.

"We don't have to do it," she said.

"We do it because we think it's important," Tomsic said, finishing her partner's sentence.

"We're trying hard to make it a priority. It's something you have to do if you want to live an honest life," Findlater said concluding the collective thought.

Fly By Diner "celebrates food ... that is who we are," she adds. "We don't want to make anything that we don't want to eat."

The mobile diner parks every Wednesday at Advanced Energy and each Thursday at New Belgium Brewing Co. where Tomsic and Findlater slice, dice, stuff and bake everything from scratch for their lunch customers and catering clients.

Tomsic and Findlater partnered two years ago after meeting at Whole Foods, where Findlater ran the cooking school.

Risks and cost involved with opening a traditional restaurant were too great, Findlater said. The white trailer with the black and aqua logo of a plane coming in for a landing cost \$40,000 by comparison and can be parked pretty much anyplace with a parking lot.

Last week was their fifth Wednesday at Advanced Energy ... a cool, cloudy day with a menu geared toward Earth Day with names like Groovy Garden Gazpacho, Love Your Mother salad trio and Earth Mamma Empanadas.

Bill Grant stopped by for lunch. He is already a regular.

"It's a nice option," he said while waiting for two beef empanadas, a small gazpacho and small salad. He said he'd come more often if the diner were there, but for now, he comes each Wednesday, armed with his frequent-flyer card that will give him a free lunch after he spends \$75. "It's not like a normal ham sandwich wrapped in plastic."

David Young, an employee at VOLT, tried the diner for his second time, ordering the Tree Hugger, a roasted chicken sandwich with poblano-pumpkin-seed pesto, fresh greens and roasted red peppers or tomatoes.

"They're wonderful people, and it's always something different," he said. "I don't always like something different, so becoming a regular at something that is always different, I don't know."