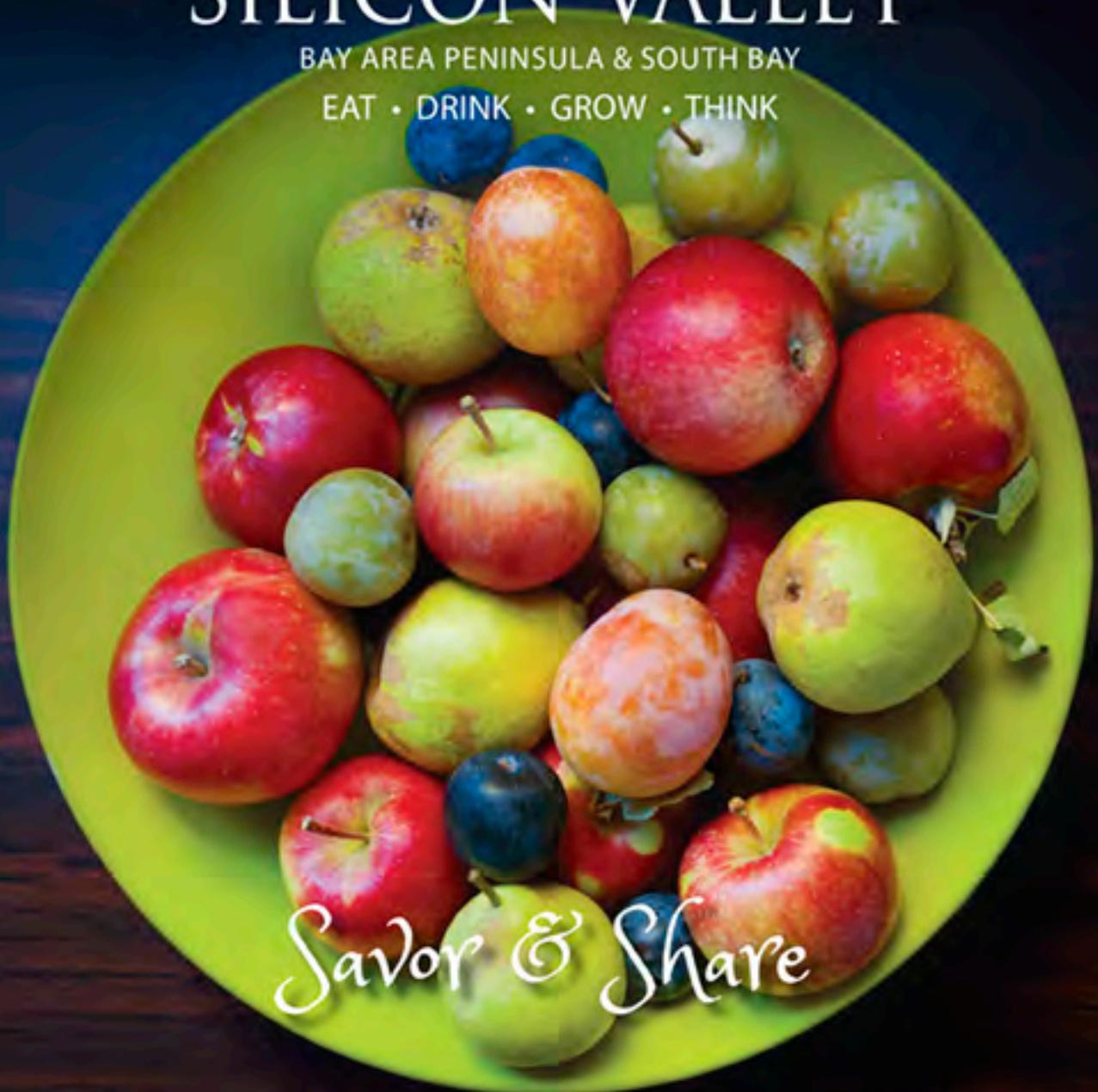


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Meet the Farmer

Epicurean Group Events Let Farmer and Diners Mix and Mingle

BY KATE EVANS

At the Arcade Café in Santa Clara, an Epicurean Group restaurant nestled in the bottom floor of a high-tech office building, Al Courchesne might look a bit out of place in his denim overalls and even tan, but he's the farmer at the café's "Meet the Farmer" event.

Happily fielding questions as customers sample stone fruits and homemade jams and taste recipes made from produce grown on his Frog Hollow Farm, Courchesne has plenty of knowledge and wisdom to share from his 41 years of organic farming. The bright, flavorful freshness of his fruit is a testament to his skill.

His farm, situated in California's rich Central Valley, "has a unique climate, a special terroir," he says. But what really makes his Summerset peaches, Warren pears and other fruit so perfectly sweet is his ideology: "What we do is bring back nature's perfect system of providing its own abundance," he says. "While we're organic, we're really much more than that—we value sustainable ecology."

Rick Lewis, the executive chef and manager at Epicurean Group who runs Arcade Café, believes in fresh, seasonal cooking that highlights nature's abundance. Following Epicurean Group's sustainability pledge, he sources his produce from within 150 miles and purchases from local farmers at the peak of freshness.

Lewis's menu the day of the Meet the Farmer event showcases Frog Hollow Farm produce. A delicious dill-crust rainbow trout is topped with the Frog Hollow Farm Meyer lemon marmalade. A baby red leaf salad incorporates julienned Asian pears and he has made a tapenade of sun-dried O'Henry peaches for the savory salami and cheese ciabatta sandwich. Flautas al pastor include a blistered peach and pluot pico de gallo. Because Arcade Café is one of the few Epicurean-run corporate and school cafés that is open to the public, it's the perfect venue to hold an event that espouses fresh and seasonal culinary values and educates local customers.

"Meet the Farmer" is really about passion to educate the community for the Epicurean Group, which organizes these events at its locally sourcing, sustainable corporate and school cafés and, in this case, a local eatery open to the public in an office park. At this event, it starts with Frog Hollow Farm's nutrient-rich soil and the farmer's patience and care to cultivate it, which comes full circle in the fresh, sweet fruit that inspires an inventive Arcade Café menu. And then the customers go back to work, after enjoying a wonderful meal and learning a valuable lesson about just how delicious culinary sustainability can taste. ✕

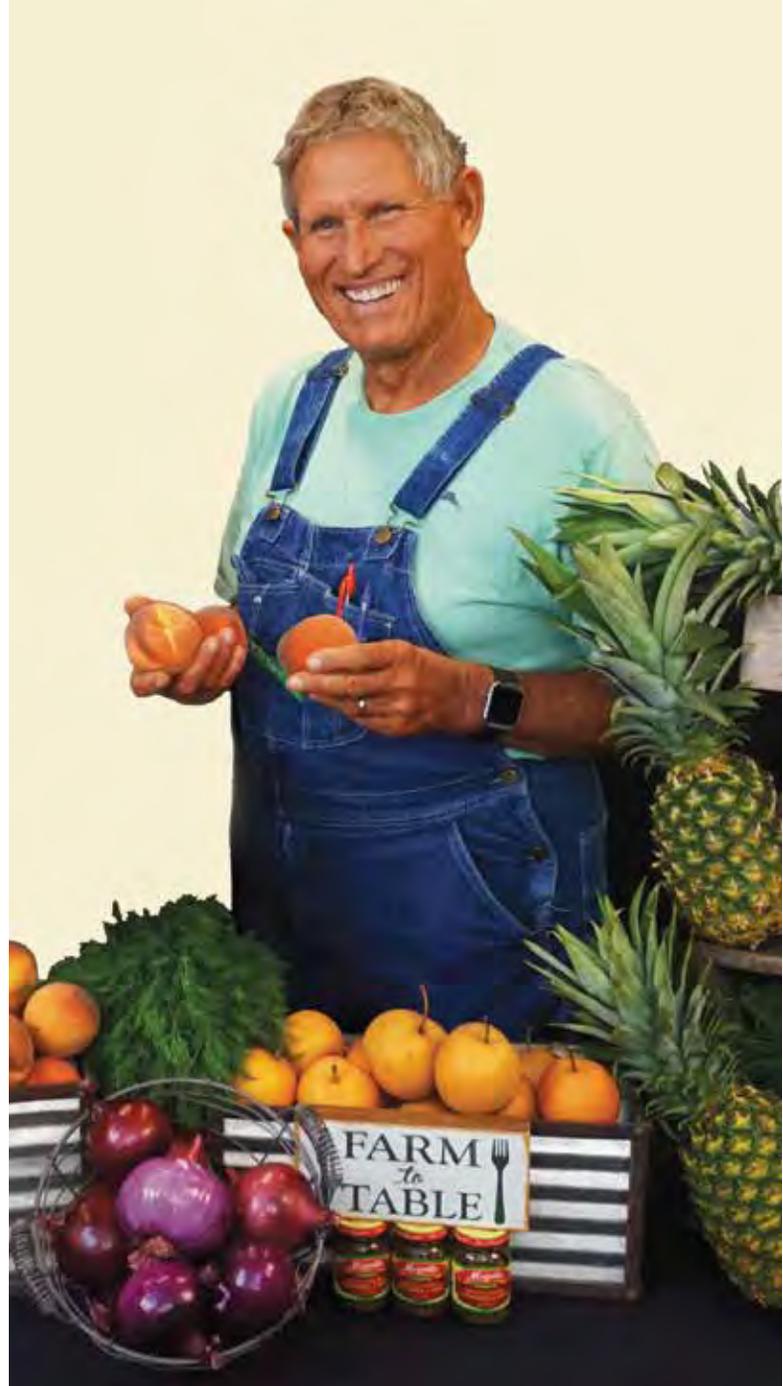


Photo courtesy of Epicurean Group