

Souper Food Kitchen

How a local chef is supporting an underserved Marin population.

By Tanya Henry



Heidi Krahlng

WHILE HEIDI KRAHLING, the beloved chef-owner of Insalata's Mediterranean Restaurant in San Anselmo, may never retire, she has stepped back from her daily restaurant work to pursue an endeavor she has dreamed of for years. Krahlng has teamed up with ExtraFood (www.extrafood.org) to transform excess produce collected by the food recovery group into restaurant-caliber soup. Utilizing the infrastructure and delivery services of the hunger relief program, and a commercial kitchen with a 40-gallon soup kettle in Terra Linda, the countywide program is bringing 140 pints of Krahlng's soup to Marin's underserved populations twice a week.

As a member of the board of directors of ExtraFood for 10 years, Krahlng often wondered if people (particularly the elderly) really knew what to do with the fennel bulbs, rutabagas and kohlrabi that are picked up in bulk from farmers markets and grocery stores and delivered to folks with food security issues. She suspected many of these items ended up in the green bin. She wanted to change that.

"I have been blessed to have a successful restaurant and to be able to cook for so many people who enjoy my food, but now I want to cook for people who really need to eat, and who can't go to restaurants," says Krahlng, who has been cooking professionally for 45 years.



Ritter Center volunteers



Food Recovery Coordinator Trevor Palacio and Ritter Center volunteer

Those who know the chef know how much she cares. She cares about her family, her staff and her community. And she also cares deeply about her food — it must taste good. She is adamant that she will not make “stone soup” for her community — in her words, she wants “more finesse and more deliciousness.” This means she adds her own ingredients (not just what is collected) to ensure the final product is something she can be proud of and stand behind.

“The single most challenging thing about this operation is not knowing what is coming in,” says Krahling, who has already transformed excess pounds of button mushrooms, heads of cauliflower and bags of potatoes into hearty, satisfying concoctions made with plenty of flavor-enhancing herbs and spices. Clearly, if anyone can improvisationally figure out what to do with multiple heads of cauliflower

and more celeriac than can fill a refrigerator in the dead of winter, it’s Krahling.

ExtraFood serves 10,000 Marin residents every week, and on January 10 a group of low-income seniors received Krahling’s very first batch of Tomato & Fennel Soup. The early feedback was positive. ExtraFood’s director of programs, Monica Ravizza, relayed that many recipients expressed how they felt truly cared for — impressed that the chef of Insalata’s would cook for them. Or as Ravizza put it, “The soup warms their bellies and their souls.”

It’s a safe bet that Krahling’s soups will only get tastier as the seasons change and more produce becomes available. She is already eagerly awaiting the first pea shoots of spring and she never stops thinking about what she will make next with whatever bounty comes her way. 