

BUSINESS

Former Aki's Bakery site now schools Silicon Valley's students on healthy lunches

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The former site of Aki's Bakery, once a Willow Glen staple, is now home to a different burgeoning neighborhood business, one that focuses on feeding the next generation.

My Green Lunch is a school lunch provider that aims to provide healthy, locally sourced hot meals to Silicon Valley schools. Partnering with local farmers and using compostable packaging, the company aims to maximize its reach while minimizing its negative impact.





Todd Evjenth started My Green Lunch after noting the lack of healthy options at his kids' school. Now, his Willow Glen-based company serves more than 1,000 hot lunches each day to 23 South Bay campuses in San Jose, Cupertino, Los Gatos, Fremont and Palo Alto. (Photo courtesy of My Green Lunch)

In 2012, Todd Evjenth started the company after noting the lack of healthy options at his kids' school. This is arguably a common practice, since according to USA Today, meat served in many cafeteria lunches does not meet fast food restaurants' quality standards.

Evjenth launched My Green Lunch with just two employees. Now, his company serves more than 1,000 hot lunches to 23 South Bay campuses each day.

The company creates its food in small batches each morning. Ten cooks arrive at the kitchen at 355 Meridian Ave. at 4 a.m. and get to work preparing that day's entree options. There are always 10-14 options students can choose from, including two vegetarian options, two gluten-free meals and two dairy-free lunches.

The cooks then seal the food in individual, compostable containers and send the lunches off to their destinations. Since its start, the company has used entirely sustainable materials and sourced locally, aiming to cut down on oil usage from both plastic containers and food shipping.

With options ranging from orange chicken to tofu tikka masala to classic taquitos, the company aims to serve a menu that reflects the diversity of the Bay Area's student population. It's a far cry from what the employees remember eating



Bret Bigger started at the company as a delivery driver while completing his degree at San Jose State University. After graduation, he was promoted to business development manager. He remembers his favorite school cafeteria offering: nachos with fake cheese and mystery meat.

In contrast, each My Green Lunch meal comes with a hot entree, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and a healthy dry snack. The produce is mainly organic, and the company varies its offerings, including fresh seasonal produce like pineapple. Bigger says the goal is to make healthy as delicious as possible.

“To know we can provide kids with 33 percent their daily nutrition, it’s a big job,” Bigger said. “The earlier we can teach them about healthy eating, the better.”

The company is relatively small compared to other hot lunch providers, but the smaller scale allows them to provide more personalized service. Each of the more than 1,000 lunches they produce each day gets hand-labeled with the student’s name, grade and order, so schools save time and resources passing them out.

My Green Lunch also adapts its offerings to suit each school’s needs, such as bratwurst for a local German school, and large banquet trays and serving spoons for preschools aiming to teach kids portion sizes. And they adjust the menu according to feedback, frequently enlisting employees’ school-age kids (as well as Bigger’s grandmother) as guinea pigs for new recipes.

The 23 schools My Green Lunch currently serves are all within about a 25-mile radius of the company’s Willow Glen hub. Delivery drivers make daily trips to Fremont, Cupertino, Los Gatos and Palo Alto, and they also bring food San Jose Christian School and Achiever Christian School in Willow Glen.

Bigger says the kitchen has the capacity to produce more than twice as many meals—up to 3,000—and My Green Lunch could expand to two kitchens if the demand grows beyond that. They’re currently drawing up contracts for the upcoming school year, but in the future would like to provide service to the whole Bay Area.

“Health is wealth,” Bigger said. “We can start these kids on a healthy path at a young age, or at least plant the seeds. We may not change everyone’s minds, but we can plant the seed.”



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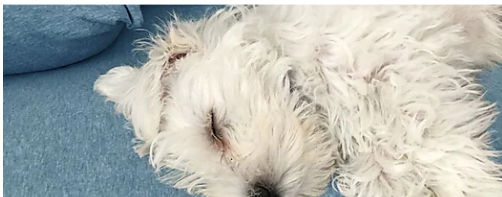
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