

HEALTHY EATS: FeelGoods Healthy Family Cafe in St. James, NY



(L-R) Nicole Lawrence and Kathy Gerdes of FeelGoods Healthy Family Cafe in St. James, NY

FeelGoods Healthy Family Café in St. James, NY is like no other healthy eatery on Long Island. Food additives, dyes, antibiotics, high fructose corn syrup and trans fats are banned from the café's doors. Special attention is paid to the smallest details that make the biggest difference - only the freshest, all natural and mostly organic whole foods are used, leaving an indelible impression upon your taste buds and your body. They don't call it FeelGoods for nothing. Here, you can choose from special feature wraps and paninis, create-your-own specialty salads, kid's meals featuring healthy spins on classics like baked chicken nuggets, organic macaroni and cheese, the old reliable PNB (or soy butter) and jelly on

whole grain bread with apples. The all natural soups are low-fat and nutritious and includes a slice of whole grain warmed, nutty panini bread toasted with soy butter.

Homemade specialty salads like brown rice & avocado (with black beans, EVOO, tomato and lemon juice) is simple, yet satisfying. The soba noodle salad is similar to the cold sesame noodles you get at your Chinese take-out place, only better since they're lighter and creamier and are made from buckwheat protein which has a lower glycemic index than regular noodles. For those of you who never thought you'd try black-eyed peas, try them in a salad with sundried tomatoes, balsamic vinegar and tamari for a twist. For the well-seasoned vegetarian, or accidental vegetarian out there, you can't go wrong with an old standby, the veggie burger - Wendy's Garden Fresh Garden Burger made with mozzarella (vegans can hold the cheese) - a delectable blend of vegetables made into a light patty smothered with fresh carrots, sweet corn, red onions, organic greens and dripping with a light raspberry vinaigrette on a very thin whole wheat pita.

Nicole Lawrence, founder of the café, graduated with a business degree from Cornell University and hails from a family of local entrepreneurs. "My mom brought me up to eat healthfully and to read labels. I was working at my family's engineering firm and I felt like I needed a change, where I could come into work every day and I had a personal connection to people, something I'm passionate about and something the community needed," she says. Lawrence came up with the concept of a healthy eatery that promotes not only a healthy menu, but educates the public in eating in an organic, wholesome way. By her self-serve coffee counter is a small but growing library of informative natural eating books. "We like to teach people not only about what's healthy, but the fact that food is like medicine. Food can make you feel good or make you feel not so good. That's why we're here, to make you

feel good."

Many of the items on the café's menu are meat-based, but with ample vegetable and fruit sides to accompany them. "Often, first-timers stick with what they know, but come away feeling like they could try something a little more adventurous the next time they come in," says Lawrence.

For all you carnivores, you can choose from several selections in each meat category. A small sampling includes: Turkey (Asian or Mediterranean Turkey salad), Chicken (Southwestern Chicken or Cobb Salad, Classic, but Healthy Chicken Parm Wrap) and Beef: the Bison Burger (less fat, calories and cholesterol than skinless chicken breast!); The Texas Two Step (All Natural Roast Beef and Cheddar, BBQ sauce, organic tomatoes, red onions, organic brown rice and greens on a wrap or panini) is out-of-this world-delicious! Pizza addicts can try a healthier version of their favorite - garlic and tomato pizza made with a thin whole wheat 7-grain Kashi and flax seed crust.

For those with a sweet tooth, the café serves natural gelato (less butter fat than conventional ice cream), sorbetto, organic fruit smoothies and homemade muffins and cookies. Beverages include organic coffee and cold drinks with only natural ingredients that are lightly sweetened naturally. Breakfast is also served - choose from organic egg omelettes and sandwiches (3 veggies, all natural cheese in a whole grain wrap or on a whole grain English muffin, or with a side of whole grain flatbread), oatmeal whole wheat pancakes and whole wheat French Toast all topped off with 100% pure maple syrup and organic fruit. As if this weren't enough, FeelGoods now offers catering services that provide all-vegan, gluten-free, low-sodium, and other healthy selections upon request.

"The key to eating healthfully is portion control," says Lawrence. "Customers can create their own meal and teach their children about eating healthfully as well." There's a chalkboard to the left when you enter the café featuring a 4 foot-high vegetable or fruit character of the month. Children, with guidance from their parents, are encouraged to learn about the special characters, so eating them takes on special significance.

Lawrence's partner and FeelGoods chef is Kathy Gerdes a vegetarian who's been in the food business practically all her life. After owning a deli in Kings Park with her husband, where they offered healthy deli fare for 20 years, and working in the restaurant business for a while, Gerdes answered an ad which Lawrence ran on Craig's List looking for a chef and business partner. "It was fate," says Lawrence. "There was no rhyme or reason for us meeting. It was meant to be," she says.

"I've been in this business all my life, and when I saw the ad, I told my husband, this could be something very interesting," says Gerdes who admits she was into health food and natural eating long before it was popular. "This way of eating used to be considered alternative. Now, it's becoming mainstream and that's very exciting, to finally see how people's minds have been changed around by the natural eating movement."

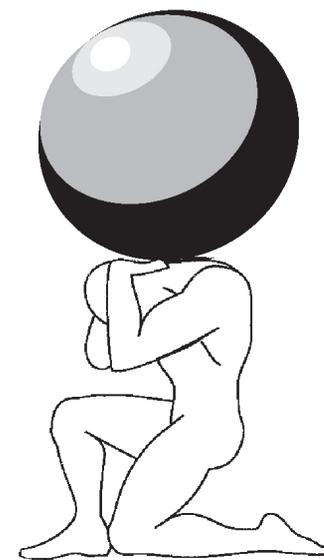
FeelGoods Healthy Family Café is located at 412 North Country Road, St. James, NY. For more info, call 631-390-8545, or visit: www.feelgoodsforlife.com.

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