

"If you don't want it printed, don't let it happen."

Aspen Daily News

TACAW adds culinary arts to programming with new cafe, Tabl

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

By Jacqueline Reynolds Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

The Arts Campus at Willits has teamed up with Aspen Epicure to incorporate a culinary element into its robust programming. The new cafe called Tabl — pronounced "table" — will formally open for lunches, Friday happy hours and special events starting March 8, bringing a dynamic menu and dining experience to the artistic venue.

TACAW Executive Director Ryan Honey said that a culinary component was always in the vision for the arts campus, explaining how culinary arts have taken on their own creative expression in the last couple of decades, and a curated food experience pairs nicely with performing arts.

"I think food can greatly enhance any art form. I mean, it's a sensory experience," Honey said. "There's something about having that other sense added to a performance — whether it's a music show or film or a comedy show or theater production — it just adds a whole new element, and it's another chance for the



A burrata plate with pesto, herbed lavash and kalamata olive dust at Tabl on Tuesday night, one of several menu options served that evening. Courtesy of Ryan Honey

community to come together and connect in a meaningful way."

While the culinary concept wasn't feasible in TACAW's former space at The Temporary, explains Honey, the organization was able to include a full-service, sustainable kitchen in the construction of the new building, which opened this past summer.

The partnership with Aspen Epicure, a premier catering company in the valley and operator of the former SO Cafe on the rooftop of the Aspen Art Museum, came about naturally and was perfect timing, Honey commented.

"What's funny is, as we were

developing the idea for a culinary element, we always said to ourselves: The model is the Aspen Art Museum," Honey said. "They do it so well — the food is great, it's accessibly priced, it's in a beautiful location, beautiful setting and it's well run — so that was always our model."

When Epicure founders and owners Allen and Julia Domingos retired from their operations at AAM in fall 2021, it was an organic progression into their next partnership with TACAW, the couple explained.

"We're big supporters of arts in the valley, and we're thrilled about this partnership

— the people at TACAW are an incredible bunch, and they're doing so much for the community," Julia Domingos said. "It's a new culinary adventure for us, and we're happy to bring our culinary experience and knowledge to such a positive place."

Similar to the ever-changing, versatile menu concept that the Domingos curated throughout their nearly eight-year run at the museum, Tabl will provide a rotating menu with all local ingredients and create a number of cuisines to coordinate and celebrate with the cultural programming and events presented by TACAW.

"One of the great things about a rotating menu is that we're not locking ourselves into a certain concept — we don't pigeonhole ourselves into this or that type of cuisine," Allen Domingos said. "We have the flexibility to change things based on what farmers are bringing in that week, and we focus on the season, the weather and what TACAW wants to do around a certain cultural event."

Leading up to the official launch of regular programming next week, Tabl has already been enhancing the performances at TACAW with its tasteful addition to sensory storytelling. Last Friday, TACAW and Aspen Film put on a Dinner and a

Movie event, showcasing the documentary "Breaking Bread," paired with a cultural dining experience and Middle Eastern menu by the Tabl team.

Tonight, TACAW will host a Fat Tuesday party in celebration of Mardi Gras and New Orleans culture, and the cafe will curate a Louisiana meal to match the lively jazz music and livestream of Bourbon Street. Tickets for the culinary arts and entertainment event are \$45 the day of and can be purchased on the TACAW website.

The Domingos, who met when they were both working in the restaurant business in New Orleans, said the celebration will be more of an open-house type feel, and they'll be cooking up deep-rooted dishes such as gumbo, fried gulf snapper and Allen's mother's shrimp creole recipe.

"We want people to get used to coming to TACAW for something to celebrate," Julia said. "It's about community and getting community in the doors before our official opening."

Beginning next Tuesday, Tabl will offer lunch services every Tuesday-Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., with Friday happy hours rolling into light dinners and evening performances. While Tabl will potentially provide a reservation option,

Honey envisions the cafe space to be an open, community hangout.

"We want it to be the kind of vibe where you can imagine people on Fridays coming in to finish their work day on a laptop, and then they put their laptop in the car and stay in for happy hour and stay in for the show," Honey said.

In addition to the regular lunch schedule and Friday festivities, Honey said that he'll be collaborating with the Domingos on all TACAW programming, and if an event lends itself to the culinary arts, then they'll create a cuisine and dining experience for it. The overall concept, explains Honey, contributes to the growing artistic identity of the midvalley.

"The midvalley is having a great moment — there's so much new energy, and I think people have realized the midvalley has its own identity that's unique and separate, you know? There's a whole population of people who live there, work there, play there, and TACAW is central to that," Honey said. "There are some great restaurants already in the midvalley, and we're adding another one."