

In fast-food world, some prefer a slower pace

BY SHAWN FLOYD , STAFF WRITER



Slow Food USA members from left in the Central Market cheese department are Kim Pierce, Darlene Barnes, Michael Cox and Karen and Richard Silverston.

In a whiz-bang society where fast food is king, a group of North Texans chooses to go against the grain.

The 70 members of the North Texas chapter of Slow Food USA, an international organization, has a simple mantra: Slow down and enjoy the Earth's bounty.

Take time to savor a meal, rather than eating while standing or sitting in an automobile.

From there, members are encouraged to rediscover older ways of cooking and to preserve those traditions and the food used in earlier times.

Founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini of Bra, Italy, the movement quickly spread throughout Europe after the introduction of American-style fast-food restaurants and homogeneous supermarkets.

Eighteen years after the idea was conceived by Petrini, the organization has more than 65,000

members in 45 countries.

In the North Texas area, members include people such as Frisco residents Karen and Richard Silverston, who, though they grew up in the U.S., like the idea of returning to the past.

"I thought their values are so good," says Karen Silverston. "It's all about pleasure, integrity, and authenticity and the ritual of the table with family and friends as opposed to rushing around."

Her husband is partial to the educational portion of the organization. He points out that members receive publications on a regular basis. These publications serve to educate members about different foods around the world.

Every issue features a different type of food. In one issue it was farmstead cheeses, made on the farm where the milk is produced. Members not only learn the how-tos of the processes, they also become privy to local and regional sources, such as Debbie and Michael Sams' Kemp, Texas, farmstead baby gruyere and Mozzarella cheeses, and Cathy Cooper's Texas peaches.

One thing they're not is controversial or political. On the contrary, even though it may not be the most popular trend at the moment, Richard Silverston says they're only out to support "ecologically sound food production."

"It's not a fanatical organization," he says. "They're not for extreme anything like extreme Atkins diet or organic anything."

Michael Cox is another member of the organization and a leader of the group, who as manager of the Central Market in Plano, practically lives and breathes the concept of slow food.

"I look at it as a great group of people who love to celebrate food," says Cox. "People who love to experience their life in different ways."

He too says politics is out of the picture.

"We try not to be political, formatted, or too organized," adds Cox. "We try to keep it loosely gathered."

Steering clear of controversy, the talk turns instead to foods such as Red Bourbon wild turkey, something Cox says, "It's one of those things that once you have had it, you will enjoy it."

"It tastes like turkey."

Foods such as this fall into the heritage category that might've been popular in the past but are now facing extinction.

Cox says though Red Bourbon wild turkeys are few and far between, he says his group has located a farmer interested in raising the birds. He says the turkeys come from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Missouri.

Other examples are pastel-colored radishes, maroon-colored carrots developed by Texas A&M, and wild salmon. Many of the products are only available at certain times of the year.

Cox estimates that Slow Food USA's membership is made up of 40 percent food professionals and 60 percent lay people.

For the benefit of all, there are special tasting and educational events. The last time the North Texas group assembled was for a cheese tasting at Fair Park. In early June, there will be a membership meeting and dinner at Arcodoro Pomodoro, a Sardinian-style restaurant in Dallas. At that time, members will not only sample Italian specialties, they will also learn about the regional cuisine of Sardinia, a peninsula off the coast of Italy.

All throughout the year there are events held across the U.S. In July there is the annual Westward Slow event in Denver, and in September it's heritage food demonstrations at a Shaker village in Chatham, N.Y. Oct. 21-25 members gather for the largest international food festival in Turin, Italy. Other international events include festivals in Kenmore, County Kerry, Ireland and in the Barossa Valley of Southern Australia. For information, go to www.slowfoodusa.org or www.slowfood.com. Between these events, members stay busy tasting such things as pixie tangerines, Gravenstein apples, and Pecos melons. And what it all comes down to is preservation of the old ways and quality over quantity, something Karen Silverston says has been a part of her life ever since she began traveling after college. "I used to travel and my mom always saved my postcards and every one of them talked about food," says Karen Silverston. Silverston grew up in Chicago, where her home food fare was mostly a Midwestern meat and potatoes experience. She says as soon as she could drive, she would venture to Chinatown and other parts of the city to taste the ethnic foods offered in the windy city. Richard's mother was from Marseilles, France. He grew up on his mother's fish soups, Coquilles Saint Jacques and he marvels at his late mother's ingenuity. "When she came to live in California, she used what was available there on the West Coast," he says. To this day, his favorite foods are simple ones. "I like a nice salad with olive oil and balsamic vinegar lettuce," he says. His wife's favorites are the French goat cheeses from Provence and sheeps milk cheese from the Basque area of Spain and France. And then, she says, "Nothing's better than bread and cheese and the salad that Richard talks about. And a whole roast chicken."

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