

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Is an adventurous stomach the key to a young heart? These Placer County seniors think so

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Sun City Lincoln Hills' Food Adventures Club has 240 members in total.

A group of gourmands have found food as a means of exploring the world beyond their Placer County 55+ community.

About 240 Sun City Lincoln Hills residents belong to the Food Adventures Club, a collection of open-minded senior gourmands looking for culinary escapades in their twilight years. Seventy is the new 60, as club president Paul Wankle said, so why not keep a young heart and a willing palate?

"We're doing stuff that 30-40 years ago, our parents would never have done at that age," Wankle said. "So that's changed, and the more contemporary or younger tastes are more aligned with those people. And I think even our older population in the group are following along that, too."

Many baby boomers have grown accustomed to eating well, and they're bringing change to senior living communities throughout the United States. Sonrisa Senior Living in Roseville recently poached chef Russell Middleton from Willow, a Southern Italian fine dining restaurant in downtown Sacramento. In Elk Grove, The Park

at Laguna Springs sources local produce for monthly-rotating menus that wouldn't be out of place in midtown Sacramento.

Some members of the Food Adventures Club worked in the industry, like Mike Phillips, who co-founded BJ's Restaurants & Brewhouse in Santa Ana in 1978. Van Heeter, another member, ran a 150-seat seafood restaurant in Florence, Oregon, where he claims to have been the first person to commercially harvest mussels on the West Coast.

Others simply enjoy tagging along to wine lunches at Wise Villa Winery, or touring San Francisco Bay Coffee's roastery, which is actually located in Lincoln. Exclusive cooking classes at Napoli Culinary Academy in Arden Arcade typically fill up the day they're posted, and members can flex their home culinary skills by hosting a stop on the club's progressive dinners.

Some events involve Meridians Restaurant & Bar, Sun City's main eatery, or take place in affiliated cafes throughout the complex. Brendan Linnane, the owner of Foggy Dew Funghi in Newcastle, is scheduled to give a presentation about mushrooms; Meridians chef Tatiana Hylton will then demonstrate how to prepare an appetizer from some of Linnane's harvest.

After adding 70 members throughout 2023, the Food Adventures Club has some real buying power, even if not everyone participates in each activity. When the group decides to close down beloved Rocklin Lebanese restaurant Wally's Cafe for a private meal, the 50 tickets are usually snatched up within a day, Wankle said.

Lincoln's population surged from 11,000 residents in 2000 to 52,000 today, at one point becoming the United States' fastest-growing city, and the city's housing stock continued to boom as people left the Bay Area for more open space during the pandemic.

Sun City has been a major part of that population growth. Roughly 11,000 residents over the age of 55 live in nearly 7,000 homes surrounded by a softball field, two golf courses and 15 pickleball courts, among other amenities.

Younger residents tend to be more interested in craft breweries or local wineries than those in their 70s or 80s, Wankle said. Yet when he bought Champagne for a prix-fixe lunch hosted at Sun City, Food Adventures Club members surprised him by asking for glasses — and then seconds.

"If you create something that's appealing, we've got people out here that'll do it," Wankle said.

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WHAT I'M EATING

Most members of Sun City's Food Adventures Club don't actually think much of Lincoln's restaurants — they're more likely to visit Roseville, Rocklin or Auburn for an ambitious dinner out. One restaurant making waves in the city's dining scene, though, is Omakase Por Favor.

Jeana Marie Pecha's culinary journey began as a 14-year-old dishwasher at McCormick & Schmick's in Roseville and led to her cooking at high-end restaurants in Pasadena, Spokane and Napa County. But her time in Colima, a small state on Mexico's west coast, had arguably the most conceptual impact on Omakase Por Favor, her Cali-Mex raw bar with Japanese influences that opened in November.

Omakase Por Favor has a small kitchen, but considerable torching and tweezing happens inside the rectangular bar, so grab a seat there if possible. A six-course omakase dinner is available for \$75 at the restaurant in Terra Cotta Village shopping center, or you can pick à la carte items as I did.

Oysters are one of the main draws, with my visit featuring Washington-based Hama Hama Oyster Co. bivalves. Though they're available as a raw half-dozen, broiled with miso butter or in shooters with housemade ponzu, the oyster omakase set (\$25) gives Pecha the most free reign, and she broiled four before serving with lemon and sweet marinated unagi.

The ceviche mixto bowl (\$22) features market seafood, which meant striped bass and albacore on my visit. A blood-red chili sauce spilled out across the dish, tart and tangy next to a thick tostada. As with many Omakase Por Favor items, though, its portion size left something to be desired.

One of the region's more interesting caviar services (\$125 for a one-ounce tin of Sterling's Royal Caviar, or \$200 for Tsar Nicoulai's Golden Reserve) may entice customers with a little extra jangle in their pockets. A platter of burrata, pickled onions, wax peppers and crema can all be piled on "chicharrones" made from Tsar Nicoulai sturgeon skin, though for my money, caviar's delicate flavor is often best enjoyed on its own.

OMAKASE POR FAVOR

Address: 640 Twelve Bridges Drive, Suite 100, Lincoln.

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. all days but Wednesday, when the restaurant is closed.

Phone: (916) 472-5503

Website: <https://www.omakaseporfavor.com/>

Drinks: Full bar.

Vegetarian options: Guacamole, seasonal s'mores roasted on tabletop grills or (possibly) the soup of the day.

Noise level: Medium-loud.

OPENINGS & CLOSINGS

VIP Cafe & Deli is now open at 1328 Del Paso Blvd. in Sacramento's Woodlake neighborhood. The cafe and music venue serves soups, salads and sandwiches with drinks from local roaster Resilience Coffee.

Seoul 1979 recently debuted at 3084 Sunrise Blvd., Suite 8 in Rancho Cordova, where Back to the 80's Cafe & More once stood. Gimbap, cup-bap and sushi are the specialties, though you'll also find dishes such as kimchi ramen and so-tteok-so-tteok (sausage-rice cake skewers commonly sold by Korean street vendors).

El Dorado Hills standout Bamiyan Afghan Restaurant is closing, with plans to rebrand in Creekside Plaza as Capital Kabob House, according to a Facebook post. Bamiyan first opened in 2003 in Citrus Heights and expanded to 1121 White Rock Road in 2008, but was sold to new owners last year.

Article/content also appears in the following news sources:

- dealtown — <https://deal.town/the-sacramento-bee/how-a-group-of-adventurous-seniors-explores-placer-countys-food-scene-FKZDN5M824>