

Sustainability Profile for Organic Press—Fred and Lynn Berman

Several weeks ago, I joined Fred Berman of *Pastázza* restaurant to learn about his stance on sustainability and how he and his partner, Lynn, have sought to achieve that goal in their business. Fred and Lynn had recently taken the Whatcom Watershed Business Pledge for their businesses, and I thought it would be a good time to see what else they were doing on the sustainability front; the Pledge is a voluntary watershed protection program administered by Sustainable Connections for the local Department of Ecology. Fred and Lynn own **Pazzazz, Inc.**, the collective name for their three restaurants in Bellingham—nine-year-old *Pastázza* in Barkley Village was joined two years ago by *Pizzazza* on 12th St. in Fairhaven and, last fall, by *Book Fare* on the second floor of the Village Books space.

The Bermans are long time food activists in Whatcom County, although you won't hear any boasting from them about the impact they've had. They started their work in these parts 27 years ago and are what you might call guiding lights within the food community of this region. Having first settled in Glacier, WA, Fred and Lynn started a small organic farm called *Småbruket* which they later expanded to become *Innisfree*, a restaurant serving all of the food they grew and raised right there on the spot. They milked the cows, made the cheese and butter, grew the vegetables, raised the beef, lamb, and chicken, cooked the food, served the guests . . . "For fourteen years," Fred told me as we talked, "*Innisfree* never once served a tomato out of season." The concept is one you'll find today in some of the most innovative restaurants in the country. I guess you could say that Fred and Lynn were ahead of their time.

Long-time appreciators of the Berman's cooking and ecological mindset remember those early days at *Innisfree*, but you don't have to look into history alone to see their commitment to community and the health of their region. If you've ever eaten at one of the **Pazzazz** restaurants, you know how great the food is, but what you might not know are all of the other ways that Fred and Lynn strive toward sustainability in their business and in their lives. Take their stance on what Fred calls "minimizing the waste stream": the Bermans are painfully aware that anything coming into the restaurant—food containers, laundry, paper towels, even cleaning detergents—must somehow leave the restaurant, but they know that these things don't just go away. "From the beginning," Fred told me, "we've been really conscientious about recycling and reuse and basically minimizing resource consumption." That consciousness has molded their approach to doing business from day one, and it's been a driving force in the evolution of their restaurants.

When they were building *Pastázza*, Fred and Lynn incorporated ecological thinking into every element of the project. For instance, they chose a sanitation unit which uses super high heat for dishwashing, thereby eliminating the need for gallons of dangerous chemicals most other restaurants use every day. The Bermans also opted to pay a higher price in order to have a high-tech water filtration system in part because it

would cut down on the number of waste plastic bottles they produce. As Fred gave me examples of the kinds of things they've implemented without question in the daily operation of their restaurants—dimmer switches (rheostats) on every light that couldn't be a compact fluorescent, china and flatware instead of single-service tableware, a conscious choice to go with re-finishable maple tables without linens that would require constant laundering, craft paper take-away containers, unbleached paper towels, the list goes on—I realized that he and Lynn had been far more than merely “conscientious” about minimizing waste from their business and in their lives; they'd kept sustainability as a guiding principle in everything they do. It's no wonder *Pastázza* and its siblings have developed a loyal staff and guest following, many of whom have been devoted since the Bermans opened *Innisfree* 22 years ago.

Moving to town has made for a lot of change in the Berman's lives, but when you look at the picture on a larger scale—just like the scale you need for sustainability—it hasn't changed the way they think one bit. When they shifted their focus to Bellingham, the Bermans thought about the best way to remain true to the vision they'd embodied at the farm. In fact, you could even say that they run their restaurants like they'd run a farm—no scrimping on quality, no unnecessary consumption of resources. When Fred couldn't grow his own carrots or chickens anymore, he shifted to the next best thing: he bought them from the people he knew in Whatcom who work with the same agricultural integrity that was the hallmark of *Innisfree*. “When you talk about sustainability,” says Fred, “the agricultural system has to be sustainable too.” *Pastázza* processes a lot of produce when it is in season, but when it's not available locally, they cut back, using instead the plentiful alternate options that this area provides.

While Fred and Lynn may not have their hands in soil on a daily basis, they haven't lost any connection to the food that they serve or the region where they work. As restaurateurs, they embrace their role as educators, knowing that it's up to them to show the public things that might otherwise only be obvious to its taste buds. “Sustainability,” Fred believes, “is an active and live process. It's an actualization of permanence.” What that means for Fred and Lynn is examining every element of their businesses to follow best practices—from separating out their food scraps which go to SSC's FoodPlus! Composting Program to installing an on-demand hot water heater at *Book Fare*. At their core, Fred and Lynn exemplify the ideal of life-time learning, whether it's on a daily basis from staff and guests or it comes in the form of conferences like one Fred attended this fall about the role farms and seasonal cooking play in the restaurant business. A big part of their philosophy of sustainability is having the flexibility to change while keeping in mind that each decision a business makes will have impacts farther down the line. With a view for the future, the Bermans have positively impacted this region's community for many years, and for our sake we can only hope that they'll be around for many more.