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Fine dining at the fine arts high school

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The hottest new restaurant on the Westside is so exclusive that a reservation is impossible, unless you're between 12 and 18 years old and can afford the \$14,000 annual membership.

Chez Lecocq opened three weeks ago at Georgiana Bruce Kirby Preparatory School's new home in the Harvey West area. Every day, the campus chef cooks elaborate meals for carnivores and vegetarians alike, and there's not a corn dog or state-approved slice of pizza to be found.

One recent day the menu included chicken or corn and zucchini enchiladas, Spanish rice, a mixed green salad, a jicama and asparagus salad in peanut sauce and a pesto pasta salad.

Other meals have featured meatloaf, veggie burgers, grilled cheese and asparagus sandwiches and teriyaki stir fry with vegetables and tofu. Everything is made on the premises by Rene Serna, except for the yogurt and the organic ice cream sandwiches.

"It's been really good. Every day it's been different," junior Alex Koppel said. "There's nothing unhealthy. There's no Skittles at the end of the line"

After two years of negotiating city planning rules and state education laws, the school moved from its downtown address to a former office building at the end of Encinal Street.

The downtown building was cramped and didn't have a lunch room, so students had to brown bag it or buy lunch at a downtown eatery. Now, Kirby has a mostly closed campus — only juniors and seniors are allowed to leave for lunch — and on any given day about half the school's 220 students

buy a meal from a program created by French teacher Mima Lecocq, who also own a food preparation business in Aptos.

"People say, 'You're going to make what for them?' but I want them to eat healthy," Lecocq said. "And the kids tell me they're happy"

School nutrition has been a hot topic in California and nationwide. Several rules passed in recent years have banned soda and certain kinds of junk foods from public schools, but Snickers bars are allowed because they have peanuts and food service providers say that salad bars and other healthy options often go untouched by kids with a palate for cheeseburgers and burritos.

It doesn't help that most local high schools have open campuses and are a short walk from Taco Bell or Burger King. But Kirby has a captive audience, so students either bring a lunch or line up for Serna's healthy fare.

A full lunch — as much as a kid can stack on a plate — is \$5, though students can get free lunches for working in the kitchen. The napkins can be thrown into the school compost bin and the knives and forks are biodegradable.

Teachers say they notice the kids are a lot more calm and attentive in the afternoon now that they're getting a lot less sugar and coffee, which isn't served in the dining hall.

"When we were downtown the kids had to eat out a lot," Spanish teacher Carolina Martinez said. "I'm really pleased to see all the fruits and vegetables."

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