

@PEACE

café

TEXT: SUZAN P. BABCOCK
IMAGES: COURTESY OF FRIENDS @PEACE CAFE

This is the first in a series of articles about New Garden City, a small mountainside community located on the southern outskirts of New Taipei City, where a diverse population is working hard to renew its sense of community.



The Peace Café



One of the reasons I continue to reside in New Garden City (花園新城, Hua-yuan Xincheng), a well-worn community in the hills south of Xindian (Taipei's southernmost suburb) is because of its quiriness and appealing sense of community.

Over thirty years old, New Garden City boasts the architectural distinction of being Taiwan's first gated community, but its people are also 'special', a reputation they seem to enjoy. Most are decent folks, striving to extend neighborly kindness to others, to provide their children with an eco-friendly environment to grow up in, to mend old feuds and to bring new concepts and community resources to residents.

About two years ago, some neighbors got together to talk about some of the major issues facing Taiwan and the world in general. As is the way with many such conversations, local community issues of concern were soon brought up. However, this time the discussions began to take on a spirit of their own.

Apparently the group's dynamics were right, because before too long, action plans were drawn up and implemented to create a project

which would invite community members to contribute to helping our earth to regain its health, and to introduce to them the concept of eating vegan. This was how @Peace Café came into being, through the dedication and tireless efforts of a few concerned individuals who wanted to show others how they could do their part to save our planet and its inhabitants. Nestled back from the main road leading into New Garden City, the 'Peace Café' (as it is now affectionately called by many) hasn't been open long, but it's already having a pretty big impact.

DELICIOUS, HEALTHY FOOD

"Our goal for starting [@Peace] café was actually quite simple," said Andrew Nicholls, one of the initial community members involved in the café's creation, and (together with his wife, Kelly) its first owner. "We genuinely want peace for our earth. It is our hope that all beings can live in peace, love and harmony with each other and our planet."

"We also believe that a peaceful mind comes through eating wholesome foods. If our minds are at peace, then we will feel a sense of harmony, with ourselves and with others, too," adds Kelly Nicholls, smiling at her husband.

She continues, "Andrew is always experimenting with new food ingredients and ideas in our kitchen. Right now, he is working on some new desserts for the Café."

Intrigued, I asked what he was working on. Andrew told me that he was using raw foods to create healthy and delicious desserts. Raw foods are unprocessed vegan foods that have not lost their nutritional value due to being cooked at temperatures above 115 degrees Fahrenheit (46 degrees Celsius). Vegan foods are basically all raw fruits and vegetables, sprouts, root vegetables, nuts and seeds, fresh herbs, squash, raw spices, seaweed and raw chocolate.

The benefits from eating a vegan diet or raw vegan foods include weight loss, improved digestion, clearer skin, more energy and better health. In fact, health benefits are the main reason why many people make the transition in their eating habits and diet. Doctors are now urging their patients to slow down and consider what they put into their mouths. However, being able to find and eat healthy foods (without large amounts of pesticides, preservatives or added chemicals) is a challenge. Imported organic foods also cost more. So, eating 'healthy' can be

difficult, especially for people that are on a budget.

This was another reason why the Peace Café was established, to provide people from Garden City and their friends with good, delicious and affordable food, using fresh, local ingredients from the area's farmers.



“SUZAN LAI LE!”

What a warm and cheerful welcome to receive on a cold, rainy, gloomy Taipei winter day! However, such greetings are typical at the Peace Café. After getting out of my dripping parka, I happily settled back in a comfortable chair to wait for Sin-hong Lai (Walter) and his wife Yong-chen Hong (Ann), co-managers of Peace Café, to finish chatting with customers, as they prepared their orders.

The Café's atmosphere is casual and laid-back. Its corner location is an inviting and cozy spot for people to gather; a place where they are treated warmly, and new customers instantly feel like they are sitting among old friends. This is another 'secret' ingredient for the café's success.

My favorite table is on the outside patio. Sipping from a steaming cup of foamy latte, I have a spectacular view of distant mountains and I experience a sense of growing stillness and calm, as I slowly unwind from the frenzied pace of working in the city. Most times, I am too late to get my favorite table, but that's OK. This reflects how popular this little



café has become.

As we begin our interview, it immediately becomes apparent that Walter and Ann love their work. Both have professional and international experience; Walter worked for a well-known multinational computer company while Ann was a nurse whose travels even took her to the jungles of Myanmar. This was all before they decided to take some time out in order to reassess what they really wanted out of life.

They told me that that they did a lot of soul searching about their individual values, interests, skills, personal qualities and sense of social responsibility. So when they were contacted about the possibility of becoming involved with a community project in the form of a vegan café, it caught their interest.



CONCERNS

Ann shared, “I am very concerned about the treatment of animals. Very few people realize that the majority of animals raised for human consumption suffer terribly from cruelty and human ignorance.”

Walter is also concerned, and rightly so. He told me that the massive amount of waste that is produced by livestock is out of control. This waste is contributing to water pollution; meanwhile livestock farms are getting bigger as the result of increased meat demands world-wide. But the most dangerous effect comes from the biological activities connected to livestock, which are producing a greenhouse gas called methane, an important contributor to the current greenhouse effect and shifts in climate.

Both Walter and Ann stressed that

if the average person could reduce their meat consumption by eating one less meat dish a week it would have a major and positive effect on saving our planet; which brings us back to the Peace Café.

The café's menu offers a simple but mouth-watering array of delicious sandwiches, pizzas, quiches, soups, salads, rice, noodles, pasta, homemade desserts, and the best smoothies this side of Hong Kong.

They are open six days a week from 11:30 am to 8:30 pm (except Sunday). Vegetable deliveries are made on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from local farms offering only 'pure' food items, which is another wholesome community service the Café is providing for Garden City residents.

Peace Cafe may be small, but they are having a big impact on the lives of many. We are lucky, here in Garden City, to have them as neighbors.

Getting There

Take the MRT Xindian (Green) line to MRT Xindian station, then transfer to the Green 3 bus from Wufong Junior High school on Zhongxing Rd., Sec.1. Alternatively a 30-minute taxi ride from Xindian MRT station will run to around NT\$160. Look for the second guard house and the @Peace Café is immediately on the right.



Suzan Babcock has been associated with The Center since 1987, as a counselor, lecturer and contributor to Centered on Taipei. She loves living in Garden City where life is “never dull”.