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## Slow Food Tampa Bay introduces itself with dinner at Studio@620

By Colette Bancroft, Times Book Editor

*The newly launched Slow Food Tampa Bay champions well-prepared, in-season food for a full dining experience, not just grab-and-go.*

In St. Petersburg on Thursday night, some folks were in a big hurry for slow food.

The launch of Slow Food Tampa Bay, the new local chapter of Slow Food USA, drew a large and hungry crowd to Studio@620 to sample luscious seared scallops with brown butter pomegranate risotto, zippy Bloody Mary shrimp, savory caprese skewers and more.

Watching the food fly off the trays, Fabrizio Schenardi, executive chef of Pelagia Trattoria in Tampa and a co-founder of the group, said happily, "It went out like fast food."

Fast food was the impetus for the founding of Slow Food International back in 1986. Italian epicure Carlo Petrini, incensed by the opening of a McDonald's near the Spanish Steps in Rome, started what has become a global organization with more than 100,000 members in 132 countries. Its essential aim is to reconnect us with our food - how and where it's produced, when it's in season and how to prepare and enjoy it.

Chef Dave West, co-owner of the Rolling Pin Kitchen Emporium in Brandon, cooked the dishes served at the event. He said the Slow Food movement "is an evolutionary thing, not a revolutionary thing. We can't legislate how people eat. But if we give them better options, they can make better choices."

That means involving farmers, local markets, chefs and their sources, he says. It means supporting traditional, local foodways and eating food in season. And it means teaching a whole lot of people how to prepare that food at home.

"In America, we now have two generations who can't cook. They never learned how."

West recalled growing up in Sarasota, where his grandmother kept pigs and chickens. When she wanted chicken for dinner, she "went out in the yard, killed it, cleaned it and put it in the pot. We knew where our food came from."

The Rolling Pin offers a range of cooking classes, he said, and many people need to start from scratch. "We get lots of kids who are Food Network fans, very interested in food. But all they know is boneless skinless chicken breast. They intuitively sort of know that it comes from a chicken . . . but not really."

Schenardi agreed. While working in local high schools recently, he said, "I was amazed that some of these kids, 15, 16, 17 years old, don't know what the season of the food is or where it's coming from."

Slow Food Tampa Bay is the 10th chapter of the organization in Florida. Jaye Williams, another co-founder, said the process of being sanctioned by the national organization took a couple of months. The goal of the launch event was to get the chapter known and attract members, she said.

A membership meeting is being planned for August, and the next Slow Food feast will be a dinner in October at Pelagia, with five or six chefs contributing their talents. (Dates and details will be posted on the group's website.)

Enthusiastic support from the diverse crowd was the order of the evening on Thursday. Tom Pritchard, executive chef of Salt Rock Grill and other restaurants and local culinary icon, said, "I think this is a great thing. I love seeing all these people here."

Adam and Tanya Coovadia of St. Petersburg were there for date night, but they're "very interested in organic foods; we're locavores as much as possible," Tanya said.

Adam has started growing food in the front yard of their Old Southeast home. He has read several books about "slow food, and also slowing your whole life down."

He boasts about his current pineapple crop, half a dozen or so fruits grown from the crown of a store-bought pineapple.

"It's so amazing, realizing we can put seeds from the food we eat in the ground and it grows. I'm fascinated.

"I know it sounds ridiculous. But we're so disconnected from the food we eat."

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### Slow Food USA


Mission statement: Seeking to create dramatic and lasting changes in the food system, we reconnect Americans with the people, traditions, plants, animals, fertile soils and waters that produce our food. We work to inspire a transformation in food policy, production practices and market forces so that they ensure equity, sustainability and pleasure in the food we eat.

### On the Web

Learn more about Slow Food Tampa Bay at [www.slowfoodtampabay.org/home](http://www.slowfoodtampabay.org/home).

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