

UNT opens dining hall with vegan menu

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*Mean Greens grew out of student demand.

DENTON - Has meat met its match at Mean Greens, the new University of North Texas vegan dining hall?

The 100 percent vegan eatery opened Monday - a day after students began moving back to the Denton campus. Organizers of Mean Greens aimed to create a vegan menu so colorful and mouth-watering that omnivorous students might even forget hamburger.

Vegan food isn't just about carrots and peas, said culinary operations chef Wanda White, who wants to change perceptions about the fare offered at Mean Greens.

Because vegans don't eat meat, eggs or dairy products, White spent most of the summer finding recipes that feature beans, nuts, seeds and leafy greens.

"We don't want to be stale to people," said White, who has cooked professionally for 30 years.

"We want them to know that every day there is going to be something new."

The dining hall, at the Maple Hall dormitory, served healthful food such as greens and chicken before going vegan.

"I like it," said Katie Heath, a 19-year-old freshman from Keller. "I like that it is healthy."

The change came in response to growing student requests for more vegan options, said Ken Botts, special projects director for UNT's dining services.

Mean Greens also reflects how college dining has evolved from cafeteria-style - once dominated by hamburgers, fried chicken and pizza - to a setting that offers options that students demand, including more healthful and international foods. For example, students at the University of Texas at Arlington can stop at a hummus bar that offers three different types.

"It's not us changing it," Botts said. "It's us listening to the students on what they want in dining."

Botts said UNT's food offerings for vegans and vegetarians have grown through the years. The campus started with a vegan section in the dining hall and later expanded to a vegan line of "hot food."

Student input also prompted UNT to feature Southern home-style comfort food at another dining hall, Botts said. That menu includes barbecue, fried chicken, jambalaya and fried pickles. It caters to a different student group: "Students who like meat," he said.

Hungry students entering Mean Greens at lunchtime Monday found offerings such as sweet potato burgers, roasted corn and quinoa casserole. Students can try sushi made of fresh vegetables, shepherd's pie without the meat, and spinach lasagna with crumbled tofu instead of cheese.

Carl Schroeder, a 19-year-old sophomore from Los Angeles, said he didn't know whether the change was a good idea at first, but he was won over by the spinach lasagna and an avocado sandwich. He said he likes having a healthy food option.

"I'm not a big meat eater, but I'm not vegetarian," he said.

Chris Vorgert, 18, a freshman from McKinney, said he liked his peppery green beans.

"I think it's pretty tasty," he said.

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