

CHEF PLANS NEW INCUBATOR KITCHEN AND MARKETPLACE



JON WEIAND — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Cat Hernandez, Andrea Mollenauer and Sally Kane pose for a portrait in the Food Lounge, which will be their marketplace-style space downtown Santa Cruz.

The Food Lounge will occupy for Center Street Grill

By J.M. Brown

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SANTA CRUZ » Building on the growing movement that places artisan food and drink purveyors under a single roof, a Santa Cruz culinary arts teacher is launching a downtown venue that will feature guest chefs, pop-up dinners and special events.

Chef Andrea Mollenauer, who has run Lifestyle Culinary Arts for many years out of Front Street Kitchen, is transform-

ing the former Center Street Grill into an incubator kitchen for chefs and cooks who lack resources to open a brick-and-mortar restaurant. She also will use the site for the Regional Occupation Program's advanced culinary arts courses she has taught for years.

The 35-year-old downtown resident and Montreal native also envisions the Food Lounge, located at 1001 Center St. will feature a lunchtime cafe, occasional marketplace, music and art events, beer and wine tastings, and event rentals.

"We will be serving both food and education and doing it for the community," Mollenauer said. "I think it's a trend, and a really smart one. I want it to be a place where we can collaborate."

In recent years, public marketplaces that combine restaurants with retail outlets specializing in prepared foods — like the Ferry Terminal in San Francisco and San Pedro Square in San Jose — have risen in popularity. "Pop-up" eateries, similar to one adjacent to Santa Cruz's Assembly restaurant — also draw on the concept of a

FOOD LOUNGE

What: A community space and incubator kitchen.

Where: 1001 Center St., Santa Cruz.

Partners: Andrea Mollenauer, Cat Hernandez and Sally Kane.

Contact: facebook.com/scfoodlounge or info@scfoodlounge.com.

low-risk, low-cost venue for up-and-coming chefs.

Santa Cruz's Museum of Art & History is planning a food-driven marketplace and performance space for Abbott Square, and director Nina Simon said

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she doesn't see Mollenauer's plans as competition.

"Andrea has done a terrific job building community around local food," Simon said. "The more projects that feature the diversity and strength of our local agriculture and creative chefs, the better for everyone in Santa Cruz County."

Santa Cruz-based Mutari Gourmet Organic Hot Chocolate is a confirmed tenant for a retail spot in the Food Lounge, and Mollenauer said she is working to finalize agreements with other purveyors, including Fog Line Farm and dim-sum maker Mortal Dumpling. Until December, when Mollenauer left Front Street Kitchen, a cult following gathered there for

Mortal Dumpling's weekly pop-ups.

Mollenauer began her lease on Center Street in January and hopes to open the Food Lounge in February. But she faces a number of challenges, the biggest of which is readying the kitchen.

Having bought all the equipment from the owners of Center Street Grill, Mollenauer plans to launch a Kickstarter campaign to raise \$50,000. She is planning a pre-campaign party for potential donors.

Saturday, Mollenauer and business partners Cat Hernandez and Sally Kane, hosted 50 women and girls associated with the Santa Cruz Socialites, a networking group designed to connect women and mentor girls. The venue was "very raw," as Socialites co-founder Monica Karst noted, but that made it perfect for demonstrating the



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Adam Armstrong of Mutari Chocolate builds his company's space inside the forthcoming Food Lounge at 1001 Center St. downtown Santa Cruz.

kind of entrepreneurship the group likes to support.

"This community needs something like this for people who can't afford to rent space at the Dream Inn or Paradox," Karst said.

Hernandez, 57, who has a culinary arts degree, and Kane, 47, who has business

and accounting experience, said they bought into Mollenauer's dream because it was an exciting opportunity to blend their strengths and connect with the community.

"It's something that's feeding my soul in a different way," Kane said.