



WRA

MAGAZINE

FOOD
Glorious
FOOD

Eating at Ellsworth —
something to
write home about





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When you walk into Ellsworth Hall, you step into a dining room buzzing with traffic as students, faculty, staff and visitors carry dishes heavy with different options — bowls of warm soup, glasses of fruit-infused water, plates of crisp salad, platters of steaming stir-fry. Welcome to the dining experience at Western Reserve Academy, with local sourcing, an expanding global menu, alternative food options and an atmosphere that invites you to grab a bite to eat and then come back for seconds.





Keepin' it fresh and local

On Madison Avenue on Cleveland's west side, tucked away in a modest lot, sits a stooped greenhouse half hidden by overgrowth. The short banner stretched across the entrance reads "FRESH FARM PRODUCE." On some days, a bag of tomatoes, a couple of squash and some bushels of green beans will find their way about 30 miles east to a bustling kitchen that feeds a family of more than 400.

"We take what we can get locally," said Eddie Mundy, WRA's Director of Dining Services, which are provided in partnership with Flik Independent School Dining (ISD). "The artisanal products in Cleveland, all of the local offerings, are unbelievable."

Which is why in the fall, you have your pick of apples from local orchards in baskets, separated by variety, such as Honeycrisp, Cortland and Golden Delicious. And in the springtime, rhubarb, asparagus, peas and radishes will begin to appear on the menu. You can track these items and trace them back to their homes across the region — leafy greens from Green City Growers in Cleveland, snap peas and sweet corn from Michael Farms in Urbana and peaches from Wesler Orchards in New Paris.

Even the chicken, pork and eggs are often sourced from local vendors.

"What we bring in are heritage breeds, animals that are very ethically treated, with no chemicals, hormones, antibiotics," Mundy said. "If we're able to, we bring it in locally."

Commonly referred to as "farm-to-table dining," local food sourcing is a fast-growing trend, championed by many foodies, locavores and big names in the industry, such as chef and Cleveland native Michael Symon. The benefits of this system are bountiful: Local vendors have the opportunity to share their crops, and students, faculty, staff and visitors have access to fresh, healthy options for their meals. Anyone who steps into Ellsworth is empowered to make informed and nutritional food choices.

A global menu

Apple and soy-braised tacos with citrus pico de gallo and sweet, pickled onions.

Thai peanut flatbread, sesame noodles and curried cauliflower salad.

Beef or mushroom bulgogi with cucumber and Korean bean sprout banchan.

It might look more like a list on the chalkboard menu of a funky world-fusion food truck than meals offered at a school cafeteria, but all of these dishes have appeared recently at WRA.

Since joining Reserve two years ago, Mundy has phased in changes, such as bolder meals and the Action Station, often the vehicle for some of the more adventurous dishes. Though he will keep more homestyle, domestic meals on the menu, he likes to offer variety to students, many of whom are living away from home for the first time.

"As much as they think they want fried chicken and french fries every day, they're going to get tired of it eventually," Mundy said. "These kids will go to college with an open mind because they had the chance to try different things."

The Reserve menu is now intercontinental, featuring dishes from Ethiopia, Cambodia, Russia, Poland and Syria, to name a few. The global cuisine doesn't just provide a variety of delicious flavors, it is also a way to bring international students a taste of home.

"I'll look at the roster of who's coming in from what country and region and adapt the menu to include meals they're familiar with," Mundy said. "We work hard to bring in a global influence."

Modern & Classical Languages faculty Feng Chu (Judy) Chen says she appreciates this effort and enjoys dishes such as spicy Korean kimchi, Chinese vegetable lo mein, flavored tofu, Thai



basil or Thai curry dishes, Indian curry, Vietnamese spring rolls and Mundy's creations at the stir-fry Action Station.

"The fragrance of these dishes always brings me back to my memories of those days in Asia," Chen said. "I love cooking and usually make a variety of Thai, Japanese, Taiwanese and Chinese dishes at home, but Eddie's adventures in international cuisine just save me a great deal of time in the kitchen. I think my pots and pans really miss me this year."

Cooking considerably

In a culture rampant with food fads and intolerances, where many are swearing off processed or genetically modified foods, refined sugar, legumes and more, it can be difficult for those in the food industry to create a menu with options for everyone. But Mundy does not shy away from the challenge.

For those who make the request, there are gluten-free substitutes and dairy-free milk alternatives, plus a menu that is conscious of personal student, staff and faculty preferences.

"There are many dishes I love provided by our very own kitchen," said Chen. "Although I am a vegetarian, I can still find enough delicious options whenever I go to the dining hall."

But what Mundy and his team do goes beyond attentive accommodation; the meals are made by a staff who love food. This is why so much of what is served in Ellsworth is made from scratch, including all of the sauces and dressings.

There are nine people who make a majority of the meals at Ellsworth: Mark Kime, Executive Chef; Rich Roth, Sous Chef; Carl Stellato, Breakfast Cook; three Lead Cooks: Ben Baragry, Yong Bernabei and Katherine Washington; and three Cooks: Scott Bennett, Rose Jefferies and Gabe Mattoni. Each contribute their signature style to the table, which is why you'll find dishes like Yong's famous kimchi jjigae, Chef Mark's handmade butternut squash and caramelized onion flatbread, and Ms. Rose's collard greens with smoked ham hocks on the menu.

The folks in the Flik ISD uniforms also bring something else to the table — an unreserved and earnest friendliness that, to many, makes a big difference.

"The staff is crucial to what has become such a positive experience," said history faculty Chris Davies. "They have gotten to know us, and they know what we like. It's a great experience to go through the line and be greeted by name and hear 'You like spicy food, so I'd recommend the peanut sauce instead of the curry.' Plus, with so many options, I frequently find myself saying 'I want pork instead of beef, and then whatever you think would go best with it.' They never steer me wrong."

If the kitchen is the heart of the house, Ellsworth is the beating center of campus. For those who call WRA their home, the exemplary quality of the cooking is something they cherish and look forward to each day. [WRA](#)

“As someone who eats nearly all my meals in the dining hall with my family, my quality of life has improved significantly because of the work of the dining hall staff. It is something that we truly appreciate.”

— Chris Davies, history faculty

FEATURED RECIPE

Let's Make Hashweh

Serves 4+

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups rice, medium grain
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 pound ground beef, lamb or chicken
- 1 medium red or white onion, finely chopped
- 3 cups vegetable stock
- 2 tablespoons seven spice — *purchase in a Middle Eastern store or make your own with equal parts allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, mace, salt and white pepper*
- 1/4 cup fresh herbs, chopped — *we recommend a combination of parsley, cilantro and mint*
- 1/4 cup pine nuts
- 1/4 cup dried fruit of choice — *we use raisins and cranberries*
- To taste — pomegranate seeds, almonds, pistachios, and additional dried fruit and fresh herbs

METHOD OF PREPARATION:

- 1) Rinse the rice under cold water until it runs clear, then allow to soak in cold water for 15 minutes. This will get rid of some of the excess starch to ensure the rice is light and fluffy as well as help it cook more evenly.
- 2) Heat a large pot or Dutch oven on medium-high heat, add butter and olive oil, then lightly brown ground meat, seasoning with 1 tablespoon of seven spice. Add onions to ground meat and continue to brown until the meat is cooked through, about 10 minutes.
- 3) Lower heat to medium-low, thoroughly drain rice and add to pot, stirring to ensure rice is evenly distributed. Season with remaining 1 tablespoon of seven spice and stir in vegetable stock.
- 4) Cover with lid and allow to cook 20-30 minutes or until rice is tender. Add fresh herbs, pine nuts and dried fruit, stirring just until combined.
- 5) Garnish with pomegranate seeds, nuts, fruits and herbs as desired. Enjoy!

