

northwest meetings + events

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Cooking for the Cause

Ellen Ranta



For Lisa Dupar, going green encompasses more than just doing away with plastic water bottles. The Redmond, Wash.-based caterer is shrinking her ecological footprint in every aspect possible.

"There is so much involved in changing the way a company runs," Dupar says. "But the more I learn about what I can do, the more involved I become."

Dupar founded Lisa Dupar Catering in 1983 and has been going green for the last few years. She says she is already amazed at the impact it's had.

"When we first started composting the waste, I thought we'd maybe fill a small bin each week, but it turned out to be a huge dumpster every week," she says. "It's shocking what is actually compostable." She adds that another company takes the compost and uses it, so that it doesn't go to waste.

Compost is only one aspect of Dupar's mission to go green. Like most workplaces, her staff used to walk in the door every day with disposable coffee cups, so she bought them reusable mugs. She also uses biodegradable straws made of a corn-based product instead of plastic for serving cold drinks and bamboo stir sticks for hot drinks.

Throughout her 14,000-square-foot kitchen, as well as her attached restaurant, Pomegranate Bistro, Dupar switched out the old light bulbs for lowenergy alternatives and is now spending two-thirds less each month on the energy bill. Her company uses dishwasher detergents made of natural enzymes and is investing in new, low-energy ovens. She even sells the company's used fryer oil, which is made into biodiesel fuel.

When it comes to going green outside of the company's kitchen, Dupar stresses the importance of buying local ingredients. "We have great food that comes from the Northwest. Regional cheese is great—why do we need to fly in cheese from Italy and France? Farmers' markets are a great resource for local, organic foods that didn't use a ton of fuel to get to where they are," Dupar says.

She recognizes the higher cost that these products can have, but says, "It might be worth spending more now, rather than later in life for health care needed from eating so much processed food."

A great way to save money and the Earth, Dupar says, is to buy what's in season. "If I'm catering a December wedding and the couple wants strawberries. I may suggest other options that wouldn't have to be flown in from the other end of the world, which saves on money and oil," she says.

Another option Dupar encourages for her customers is to forego the ubiquitous plastic water bottles and use large jars or pitchers of water instead. "The water bottle thing is huge when you realize how much they add up. We realized that in six months we were going through 50,000 water bottles," she says.

For linens, Dupar uses laundry services that are eco-safe and stay away from harsh chemicals. "It's so important to choose and support vendors that are on your team, that are aiming to be eco-conscious as well," she says.

The demand for green catering is prevalent in the Northwest, but for Dupar, a South Carolina native, the choice to

go green was more personal than professional. Her father is a nature photographer who spent 50 years documenting rainforests being cut down and different species of animals disappearing.

"Seeing all that, the actual proof of the impact we've had on the planet really convinced me to do what I could," she says. "Plus, I'm a chef, so that makes me a bit of a healthfreak and genetic engineering is scary stuff."

When choosing menus for her restaurant or events, Dupar insists on checking the sustainability of food choices. For fish, she checks the Marine Stewardship Council website to ensure that she won't be endangering a species by serving it.

"Events in the Northwest want salmon all the time. Oregon and California have shut off salmon fishing because of the low numbers, so I may ask if we can persuade them to use halibut instead," she says. Living in an eco-aware region like the Northwest, people can usually be persuaded to alter their plans a little for the environment's sake, she says.

Dupar is effusive in her praise of the region and compares it to her native South Carolina, where "they are hardly even recycling," she says. "It's trendy here to be green. A green catering company can be successful in the Northwest because it isn't cool to be wasteful," she says. Her clients want sustainable, environmentally friendly options, and vendors in the area are providing green services, she says.

Even with the demand and services available, Dupar says that the biggest obstacle is still the cost, simply because organics cost more.

"My sous chef went to buy basil one night and had a tough time making a decision because normal basil is \$3 and organic is \$12. That's a huge difference, and if caterers and restaurants are going with all organic, those costs will be reflected on the menu," she says. But for Dupar, the environmental costs outweigh the financial.

"It's really a huge process, but I feel that it really is my responsibility."

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LISA DUPAR CATERING // 425.881.3250 // www.lisaduparcatering.com