

NAPLES NEWS

Southwest Florida restaurants diligent about ensuring environmental responsibility

By KATY BISHOP

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PHOTO BY MICHEL FORTIER

Executive sous chef and self-titled recycling enforcer Dallas McCutcheon, left, and executive chef Sebastian Marzzotta, right, have taken to the idea of recycling at Naples Tomato where the two work. Recycle bins have been placed around the restaurant and during the week, they're filled about six times a day, eight on the weekend.

This locally-grown tomato is greener than most, and that's just the way its creators want it to be.

Naples Tomato is one of many restaurants in Collier and Lee counties that is working to reduce the amount of garbage it sends to the landfill. And while their strategies are different — from recycling and using biodegradable containers to eliminating plastic altogether and composting food scraps and paper — their goal is the same: to be more environmentally responsible.

Naples Tomato, Ted's Montana Grill and Food & Thought Organic Market & Restaurant are three establishments that are thinking about their impact on the environment and they all hope that more restaurants will join them.

Team recycling at Naples Tomato

Outside Naples Tomato, an Italian restaurant in North Naples, there are 12 96-gallon recycling bins that are filled and emptied about three times a week in season.

That's nearly 14,000 gallons of cans, bottles and paper a month that doesn't go into Collier County's landfill.

Earlier this year, Collier County's solid waste management department recognized Naples Tomato with an award for going "above and beyond" the required recycling, said Margie Hapke, solid waste department spokeswoman. They were the first restaurant to win the award.

During lunch hour at the restaurant last week, a low rumble of conversation filled the dining areas as people talked over lunch. In the back, employees bustled around the kitchen and prep areas.

A line cook added vegetables and toppings to a to-go salad before snapping the top onto the recyclable plastic container. Meanwhile, Sous Chef Dallas Mccutcheon directed people as they unpacked delivery orders and crushed cardboard boxes for recycling.

Mccutcheon is the recycling "enforcer," he said with a laugh.

"I'm always looking through the garbage cans and if I catch somebody throwing something away I professionally, but muscularly, remind them," he said.

Nearby, on the side of a cooler, a list of recyclable and non-recyclable items is posted — in English and Spanish — and blue recycling bins are everywhere: three in the bar, three in the prep area and one in the pasta bakery.

Jack and Nadine Serfass, who own the restaurant at 14700 U.S. 41 N. in Naples, started the recycling program after a server, Christian Ecolani, approached them with the idea.

"We found that a lot of the people who work here really care about the environment," Serfass said. "(The program) just picked up momentum."

"I hope that other restaurants will catch on and do it, too," Ecolani said.