



Too Few Cooks Spoil the Fun

Zina Murray Brings a Sustainable Event Space and Shared-Use Kitchen to the Neighborhood

By Erica Hawkinson



Co-op member Zina Murray has always been an advocate for the Logan Square community, and she is investing in its people and future accordingly. Believing in the curative power of wholesome food and food's ability to bring people together, she and her husband, Nick, became the driving force behind Logan Square Kitchen, a sustainable private-event space and shared-use commercial kitchen that opened earlier this year on Milwaukee Avenue, just north of California.

Although Logan Square Kitchen is newly established, it's the result of a long-term effort to improve the food options of the Logan Square community. By 2006, several area grocery stores had closed. Fed up by the lack of healthy local options, Zina tried unsuccessfully to attract new grocery stores to the neighborhood, and eventually her efforts evolved into a movement to set up an indoor year-round market filled with local vendors. Once again obstacles abounded, as Zina and her husband realized that the logistics of the market would take years to pull off. But she was undeterred—the seed of an idea had been planted. Tired of seeing neighborhood problems and empty storefronts, she decided to bring two components of the grander original concept to fruition: the event space and shared kitchen.

Logan Square Kitchen is essentially two businesses operating under one roof. In the front half of the space, there is a multi-purpose room available to rent for private events. This community gathering space is largely constructed from recycled and salvaged materials. As befits the endeavor's local slant, Zina is happy to suggest nearby restaurants as caterers for private events. In the rear of the space are the state-of-the-art pastry and dining room galleys, which are available for rent by the hour. The commercial kitchen provides a suitable place for up-and-coming and already-established local food entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and has already been put to use by tincakes, Flip Crepes, and Macaron Chicago.

Logan Square Kitchen also strives to be a model for responsible and sustainable design. Zina says their objective was always to achieve gold-level LEED certification, the second-highest rating. As they have pursued this certification, which takes several years to achieve, Logan Square Kitchen has used salvaged and recycled materials in its construction, installed energy-efficient appliances, and used water-conserving plumbing products like low-flow faucets and dual-flush toilets. They ambitiously aim to be zero waste and off the grid in 10 years.

A neighborhood gathering place and support infrastructure for local food entrepreneurs, Logan Square Kitchen is more than the sum of its parts—it's a foothold for the revitalization of the community. Not only has the storefront spruced up the appearance of the Milwaukee Avenue corridor, but it is also part of the changing landscape of Logan Square commerce.

Zina says that the neighborhood response since opening has been encouraging and that she's looking forward to wonderful times ahead. And as for the long-awaited grand opening of the Dill Pickle Food Co-op, she sighs, "it's nice to be playing in the same sandbox as the Pickle."

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