

IT'S SO EASY BEING GREEN

Oakland Unwrapped!

GrassRoutes Travel

BY CHERYL KOEHLER



I used to think that all activists were born hell-raisers who had just managed to channel their urges into some worthy cause. Likewise, I suspected that those of us who prefer to play nicely with others would never be effective activists, no matter how much we care about something. I realized how much my thoughts had changed a few weeks ago when I met Serena Bartlett and Erin Kilmer-Neel. Both women are Oakland residents who believe in showing people how fun and easy it can be to join the sustainability movement.

We were talking about the burnout many people feel as they discover all the “un-green” things they inadvertently do in their daily lives, but Bartlett brought out the counter example. “The important thing is to see how your everyday actions and choices do make a difference.” *Oakland: The Soul of the City Next Door* is the first title in her newly launched urban eco-travel guide series, GrassRoutes Travel. The books feature businesses that operate in a socially responsible and environmentally sound fashion, and present an array of opportunities to explore and enjoy the heart of a city at little or no expense. They’re intended as much for locals as for visitors, and foodies will be pleased to find lots of restaurant and market reviews.

“When I was little I lived in working-class neighborhoods in

Erin Kilmer Neel of Oakland Unwrapped! shares a mirthful moment with Serena Bartlett of GrassRoutes Travel at the Old Oakland Farmers’ Market.

Philadelphia, New Jersey, and New York, where people spend too much time sitting on their porches. As I started to travel the world, I realized, you don’t need money, you just need to get out and explore.”

Bartlett’s friend and co-conspirator, Kilmer-Neel, is executive director of Oakland Unwrapped!, a nonprofit focused on revitalizing local communities by encouraging conscious and ethical shopping patterns. She said it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by all the directives leveled at us from the sustainability movement, but “we’re into making it fun, interesting, energizing—making it easy.” Her premise is that we are going to shop anyway, so why not find locally made products and locally owned businesses to support.

Both Bartlett and Kilmer-Neel are hoping to see their business ideas spread throughout the country, either through their own efforts, or as inspiration to other entrepreneurs. This is exactly what is happening through Edible Communities, Inc., of which Edible East Bay is a part.

www.oaklandunwrapped.com

www.grassroutestravel.com

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ERIN KILMER-NEEL'S RULES OF THUMB FOR SHOPPING LOCALLY

1. Seek out neighborhood shopping districts over malls
2. If you're not sure, ask the person behind the counter, "Is this a chain store?" or "Is the owner from around here?" "Do you have other locations?" "Where are they?" If you found the store by searching the web (Google, Yahoo!, etc.), call and ask these questions
3. Check out shopoakland.com, which has a growing list of businesses in Oakland. Each business listing indicates its ownership structure (locally owned, franchise, local chain, regional chain)
4. Look for decals and directories indicating membership in a network of locally owned businesses, such as the American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA) or the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE). Member businesses often have decals on their windows indicating their membership in the local network, and the networks often have online directories of members. Find out if your community has such a network by checking the AMIBA website (www.amiba.net) or the BALLE website (www.livingeconomies.org). You can also do a web search for your community name and independent businesses.
5. Beware of shoplocal.com, a website listing sale prices at stores in a local area. It includes more chain stores than independent stores.

A few helpful tips if you're new to shopping locally:

1. Call ahead to confirm hours and that the business will be open when you go.
2. Keep a roll of quarters in your car: You'll often be parking at meters instead of in parking lots
3. Take advantage of the fact that a locally owned business has more flexibility than a chain and often can tailor services and products to you. If you don't see what you like, they might be able to order something for you, even on a regular basis. They might just start carrying it too, if they find other people also like it. Small-business owners will often throw in something for free or give you a discount when you least expect it!

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Lois the Pie Queen
851 60th Street at Adeline Street
658.5616
Open: M-F 8a-2p, Sat-Sun 7a-3p

Lois started cooking pies with her mother and grandmother for church bakesales back in the 20's. With a little help from friends and family, she brought her pies and other home cooking to us all with this restaurant. The Pie Queen, as her husband called her, passed her secrets down to her son, who operates this place much the way she did when Reggie Jackson used to chum with her over pork chops and coffee. No other Oakland eatery can claim being considered as a national landmark. No other restaurant makes grits this scrumptious. No other place has as true a sweet potato pie, or as good a breakfast bargain. Get it? Got it? Good.



Drawing by Daniel Ling