

G-REVOLUTION

5 YEARS LATER, G-ZEN RESTAURANT
LEADS A HEALTHFUL EATING REVOLUTION

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By Sam Norton, New Haven Register POSTED: 08/22/16, 6:09 PM EDT

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5 years later, G-Zen Restaurant leads a healthful eating revolution

BRANFORD >> It started with a seed of an idea — that a restaurant featuring plant-based, sustainable cuisine could succeed on the Shoreline.

“We did so many things where people said, ‘You are going to fail. You’re not going to be open on Sundays? You’ll never make it. You’re not going to be open for lunch? You’re going to fail. You’ll never make it in a location where there is no walking traffic,’” said Ami Beach, co-owner of G-Zen Restaurant. “Every restaurant failed in our location. But we felt if we did it right, the right people would come.”

Fast-forward five years and this seed of an idea has started a “G-revolution.”

In 2010, Beach and her husband, Mark Shadle, started Gmonkey mobile, a vegan food truck that sought to bring vegetables and greens harvested on their Durham farm to the streets.

“We were so successful with Gmonkey. That is when we decided we needed to have a brick-and-mortar restaurant, and we decided we really wanted to move in the direction of the G-revolution,” Beach said.

One year after taking their vision on the road, Beach and Shadle opened their first permanent location at 2 E. Main St. — 15 miles removed from Shadle Farm.

“The reason why we chose Branford was because of its close proximity to Yale University, which has a huge sustainability school,” Beach said. “There was a lack of inherent health-related restaurants along the Shoreline, nothing vegetarian. We were the very first vegan, vegetarian restaurant on the Shoreline. It felt like it was a new beginning for us.”

Beach and Shadle, who have lived a vegan lifestyle for more than 25 years, grow the organic ingredients at their farm and serve them fresh at the restaurant. Everything — from the ketchup to bread — is made from scratch, Beach said.

In addition to the nine-page menu, which caters to vegans, non-vegans, raw foodists and non-raw foodists, Beach said the restaurant features a handwritten chalkboard that changes daily with new chef’s creations.

G-Zen is considered a zero-waste restaurant and 100 percent of the food waste and biodegradable take-out containers are composted at the couple’s farm, Beach said. It’s through this business model of seed-to-table — and back-to-farm — that has earned the restaurant national recognition, Beach said.

“G-Zen is a destination place. People drive from New York City to come to G-Zen because of what we are doing there — the organic ingredients, the attention to detail, the type of food, the care in our food,” Beach said.

Since opening the restaurant five years ago, Beach said the restaurant has earned accolades from the New York Times, PETA, the Huffington Post, Travel and Leisure, Shape and Yankee magazines.

And the pair said they have no intention of slowing down.

“Our life is about bringing passion to the plate, passion to what we do. We’re not going to compromise who we are or what we do for people who don’t get it,” Beach said. “We are always expanding our mission, which continually keeps us fresh and generates new interest.”

Since launching the mobile truck and restaurant, the pair have added two new businesses to their G-revolution — G-Glo

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Juice Feast, a customized juice cleanse, and Nectar by Ami, a botanical line of perfumes and body care.

“When you’re at G-Zen, you are supporting an entire ecosystem of what we stand for, and that’s very evident when you come,” Beach said.

Six years ago, Shadle was invited to the White House by first lady Michelle Obama to participate in the Chefs Move to School initiative. Obama started the program as a way for chefs to help fight childhood obesity by adopting a school and working with teachers, parents and nutrition professionals to educate the country’s youth about the importance of eating healthfully.

“Teaching our children about the real food movement and sustainable farming within our local communities is crucial for our future on every level of existence for the human race and for the greater good of the planet and for our future generations. Arming our children with this important