

Passports: Uniting Community Through Food & Literature

Sandy Berg, Ventura County Library Foundation

Dive into Ventura County food cultures November 12, as five food influencers take center stage at noon in the Grand Salon at California State University Channel Islands for the One County, One Book kickoff.

Hosted by Ventura County Library and the Ventura County Library Foundation in partnership with CSUCI, the program commences with a VIP fundraiser featuring local food influencers with a fun Passport through food theme, followed by a free public event with celebrated author Mayuhk Sen discussing his OCOB selection, *Taste Makers: Seven Immigrant Women Who Revolutionized Food in America*.

The events focus on Ventura's local cuisines and how the community's shared passion for food and literature can bring a county together. The **Passports** fundraiser features local professionals who create, observe, document and share the foods we enjoy in Ventura County. Guests will be treated to a variety of small plates, reflecting immigrant and local cuisines, prepared by CSUCI's chef, following the conversations. Local California wines will be shared to complement the small plates.

"It's shaping up to be an incredible event," that's expected to sell out, says Event Chair and VCLF Board Member, Diana Cervantes.

"The intersection of so many of these influencers geographically, professionally and personally is gratifying. The sense of community and caring for those in need will really

surface in their conversations. These are fascinating, inspiring, successful and passionate, food-loving people,” says Sandy Berg, event organizer.

One of Ventura County’s most celebrated chefs, Tim Kilcoyne, kicks off the conversation. An area restaurant and food truck owner, Kilcoyne recently returned from Lviv, Ukraine, where he served with Jose Andres’ World Central Kitchen. While in Ukraine, Kilcoyne oversaw serving millions of refugees. He also served as Director of Chef Operations and led World Central Kitchen teams locally after the Thomas Fire in 2017. His return to Ventura County bodes well for food lovers.

Another influencer, Masha Rumer is the author of *Parenting with an Accent: How Immigrants Honor Their Heritage, Navigate Setbacks, and Chart New Paths for Their Children*. Included in her recently released book is a section on how immigrant traditions are preserved through shared family recipes. One of her treasured family recipes will be served. Born in the former Soviet Union area now known as Belarus and raised in Ukraine, her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Washington Post*, *Parents* and others, winning awards from the New York Press Association.

Sommelier and Oxnard College instructor Chef Adam Hart will share his advocacy for local, sustainable, farm-to-table style menus and training the next generation of local food professionals. He, too, has spent time alongside Nobel Prize nominee Jose Andres as well as other prominent chefs. Prior to teaching at Oxnard College, Chef Hart was an instructor at The Art Institute and Le Cordon Bleu and helped open LA Kitchen, a nonprofit culinary school aimed at training previously incarcerated adults and foster youth. He continues to

consult with restaurant owners to advocate for menus that include vegetable-forward and controlled portions.

CEO and President of Food Share Monica White will share how she led the nonprofit out of a period of financial challenges while responding to some of Ventura County's most critical hunger relief needs during the Thomas Fire and the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year Food Share served 220,000 people through a network of 190 community partners, including the Ventura County Library. Her experiences in feeding those most vulnerable in tough times is a lesson in rallying community support and community conscience—and she's a great cook!

Rounding out the conversation and bringing it home to local food trends in Ventura County is Tami Chu, food blogger, publisher and editor of *Edible Ojai & Ventura County*, and the voice behind the podcast "Organic Crumbs." Before pursuing nutrition, the Simi Valley resident taught special education, which she left to homeschool her four children. She co-founded and ran a real-food co-op and is a regularly featured commentator on food trends and health.

Following the conversations, guests can sample small plates representative of immigrant influences. Included will be tastes from India, Oxnard's Mixteco community, France, China and Italy. Wines donated by local vintners will be included with the small plate offerings.

Indian cuisine will be shared by cookbook author and consummate entertainer, Komali Nunna, author of *Entertaining from an Ethnic Indian Kitchen*. For Nunna and her family, the table is a place to break bread, make friends, share joy and revel in the abundant produce

found growing around their Camarillo home. Her entertaining style will be on display and her Indian appetizers will start off the small plates.

Courtesy of the Mexican Consulate, recipes from the Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project will be served. MICOP represents over 20,000 indigenous residents and workers in Ventura County. Their field labor makes farming profitable and fresh fruits and vegetables available to the public. Their local celebrations add to the cuisine, cultural richness and diversity of Ventura County.

California native Julia Child revolutionized what it meant to be a home cook for a generation, creating food that required skill and elevating the profile of women in the food entertainment space. She brought back her love of French cuisine after her ex-pat experience in France to a skeptical American public. Her breakthrough in bringing a bit of French sophistication to the American palate continues to resonate today.

Chinese influences in Ventura County's cuisine cannot be overstated. China Alley, which ran perpendicular to Figueroa Street in Ventura, was home to merchants, laborers and families in the 1880s, and their influence remains. A selection from their recipes will be included.

Tickets for **Passports** can be purchased for \$75 at www.OCOBTastemakers.eventbrite.com Event proceeds will help the Ventura County Library Foundation fund ongoing library programs, including the County's mobile library and the One County, One Book program. Board members represent all regions of the county. Visit VCLibraryFoundation.org for more information about the foundation.