

TRI-VALLEY TIMES

A la Carte: Freebirds in Walnut Creek, Zachary's in Pleasant Hill

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Rockin' burritos: Freebirds, the burrito joint that's fueled thousands of UC Santa Barbara students, officially opens its first Walnut Creek branch Dec. 17. The chain that one Yelper described as "Chipotle meets X Games" comes with a rock soundtrack, dude vibe and many, many choices. Customize your meal by selecting a spinach, cayenne, flour or wheat tortilla; then pick your meat (all-natural steak, pork, white- or dark-meat chicken); beans (whole pintos, refried, black); greens (spring mix or iceberg); onions (white or red); and salsas/dressings (including "Bad*ss BBQ" and "Death Sauce"). You can also customize nachos, tacos and salads.

Catch a sneak peek before opening day when Freebirds hosts a fundraiser for Tony LaRussa's Animal Rescue Foundation and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. Donate \$5 to ARF and enjoy complimentary food and drinks from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dec. 15, or \$5 to the Food Bank from 5 to 7 p.m. the same day. Details: Freebirds will be open from 10:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. daily at 1512 Geary Road, Walnut Creek; www.freebirds.com.

Deep dish heaven: Soon there will be no need to go through the Caldecott Tunnel or down Interstate 680 for a dose of Zachary's Chicago-style pizza. The awesome pizza place that has delighted Oaklanders, Berkeleyites and San Ramonites for so many years is opening an outpost in Pleasant Hill at 140 Crescent Drive. They're aiming to open in January. Among their soon-to-be neighbors is Corner Bakery Cafe, a casual eatery owned by Il Fornaio, which will be moving into the Yan Can spot. The chain of cafes, which started in Chicago, offers panini, pasta, breakfast and pastries.

Creek Korean: For those of you who wondered what was going to land in Walnut Creek's old Koreana Kitchen, it's Mixed Grain -- another Korean place but this time with a focus on healthful fare. Think Bibimbap with whole grains and lots of veggies. Open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily and until 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays at 1546 Bonanza St., Walnut Creek, www.mixedgrain.com.

Send your Bay Area restaurant tips to food editor Jackie Burrell, [jburrell@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:jburrell@bayareanewsgroup).