

epicure

CELEBRATING FOOD & WINE



Seconds, anyone?

You've eaten, you've paid, you've gone home. What happens to the food that's left behind? **Leanne Tolra** reports. **PAGE 4**

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EPIASURE FOOD RESCUE


Catering for the hungry

Smart restaurants and foodstores are joining the push to produce better food for those in need, writes **Leanne Tolra**.



DID you shop at the markets this week? Or dine at your favourite local restaurant? Perhaps it was a special occasion and you ate somewhere extravagant. Or maybe you checked out your local farmers' market. Did you buy an unusual jam or condiment, or some seasonal vegetables for a weekend meal?

But for many Melburnians, "eating out" means a visit to a refuge centre.

Admittedly, most of us know more about the first situation. So you would hardly expect there to be much of a connection between the two experiences.

Except that now, there is. Because behind the scenes, an intricate network of food businesses has started creating good-quality meals for those in need. And a growing number of these are the companies and people — including restaurants

— that feature in our pages.

The 2001 census counted 20,305 homeless people in our state, and 2 per cent of Victorians access welfare agencies every year. An RMIT university report released in March found that among homeless youths in south-western Victoria, more than 75 per cent aged between 12 and 24 did not consume their daily energy requirements.

Food rescue, or food recycling, uses food that would otherwise be wasted. It's about giving good, fresh ingredients new life in a commercial kitchen and, with a bit of creativity, turning them into healthy, hearty meals.

Until a few years ago, this was illegal. But in 2002, the Victorian Government's Wrongs Act created new protection for those donating food "in good faith for a charitable or benevolent purpose", provided the food was "safe to consume at the

time it left the possession or control of the food donor". In response, restaurants, cafes and food sellers were able to donate goods they were previously forced to dump.

One of Melbourne's newest food rescue groups is Second Bite. This small organisation was formed by a group of friends dining at city restaurant Becco last year. Two of the friends were Alister Paterson, the Liberal member for South Barwon from 1992-2002, and Ian Carson, a former Victorian Liberal Party president.

Second Bite was established six months ago to take donations of fresh ingredients from places where food is left over. A growing band of volunteer couriers collects food from donors and delivers it to places such as the Sacred Heart Mission, St Mary's House of Welcome, Open Family, the Salvation Army and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. This

is Second Bite's point of difference — it was set up to take fresh food from one place to another, where most other organisations collect ingredients and packaged food," Paterson says.

The food includes precooked meals from restaurants, fruit, meat, bread and vegetables. It is used in many of the charity organisations' kitchens to prepare or supplement meals.

Paterson says the group is on target to provide more than 75,000 meals in its first year of operation. "We get the impression that there is an almost limitless amount of food and that its use depends on the infrastructure we can create to pick it up," he says.

Critical to Second Bite's success are the businesses that make donations. Becco, the restaurant where the concept was created, provides a fortnightly donation

(Top left) Alister Paterson collects (and transports) vegetable soup from Becco's Dominic Pipicelli; (above) Errol and Margaret at St Mary's House of Welcome.

PICTURES: EDDIE JIM, RODGER CUMMINS



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of vegetable soup, as does city neighbour Bamboo House. Other donors include stallholders at Prahran Market and the Rendezvous Hotel and Catering group.

As Becco co-owner Simon Hartley explains: "The concept was using up food that could still be edible, but was not usable in a restaurant situation. We don't have a great deal of wastage here because of the nature of the restaurant (everything is bought fresh and used daily) so we offered to donate 20-30 litres of soup for them to pick up every second Tuesday." Hartley says the "little bit" his restaurant is doing adds to other charity work, is not much of an extra tax on its staff and is not costly. "We didn't want to be giving Second Bite 'old' food, so we buy it with our own order. It can be whatever we dream up using what's available, or what we get from our supplier, but it always has a high content of vegetables as a base."

Similarly, the manager at Bamboo House, Robert Wong, sees his restaurant's fortnightly donation of 20 litres of beef in black bean sauce as a humble contribution. He says the restaurant had always wanted to do something but had never been approached before.

Because Second Bite picks up the food and delivers it (to the Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda, on the same day that it collects Becco's soup), the only effort required of the restaurant is to prepare the food.

"We wanted something that would carry well and we know protein is needed, so that's why we chose this dish," says Wong. "It's not leftover food. We buy it especially and make it fresh. During the year we also give away meal vouchers to other charities, so we see this as an extension of our philosophy."

Ripe the Organic Grocer, one of several of stallholders at the Prahran Market donating to Second Bite, has a similar philosophy. Co-owner Paul Smith says Ripe's contribution takes only "a little bit of effort".

"We have a high turnover, so there's not much waste. We got involved with Second Bite through one of our customers. She comes twice a week and picks up what's left over: fruit, vegetables, bread and dairy products. But we'll also top it up with a bag of apples or a box of potatoes — that's nothing."

"We have boxes labelled for them (and other groups the company donates to, such as the Prahran Mission and the Asylum Seeker Centre in North Melbourne); we fill

Second Bite is on target to provide 75,000 meals.

them as we go," says Smith.

Other Prahran Market donors include Pino's Fine Produce, Cester's Poultry and Game, M. J. Mow Gourmet Potatoes, Neil's Meats, Russo's Fruit Supply and Reliable Fruit and Veges.

Leon Piccinin, the owner of Cester's Poultry, says he was pleased to help when approached. "We will give them sausages, perhaps a flavour that didn't sell well that week, marinated chicken wings, chicken fillets. Sometimes, if I don't have anything left over, I'll donate some whole organic chickens, or some fillets. This is something that we have been wanting to do for a long time. I'm more than happy to donate product, but I haven't got the time to run around and drop it off. We saw so much food thrown out here at the market that it was ridiculous. There is only so much we can freeze or reuse, so if someone else can make a meal out of it, that's great and we feel good about doing it too."

John Narduzzo, of Pino's, says he provides "a trolley load" of the basics: potatoes, carrots, onions, celery, apples and tomatoes. "We always give product away, never money, and I never ask questions. I believe that you can never say no to this sort of thing, because you never know when it can happen to you."

St Mary's House of Welcome in Fitzroy is one of the groups receiving direct assistance from Second Bite, in the form of bread donated by Aroma Bakery. "I think it's fantastic what Alister has done," says Sister Roseanne Murphy, the day centre manager at St Mary's. "One of the lovely things about Second Bite is that they deliver food to us. We are a very small organisation and we have been going for a long time, but we don't have the staff or the capabilities to go driving around Melbourne picking up food."

St Mary's, established in 1958 by the Daughters of Charity as a crisis meal centre, receives government

funding to operate five days a week, but manages to open for an extra day paid for by donations and fund-raising. The centre offers two breakfast sittings and one lunch sitting daily. Morning and afternoon tea are offered most days.

Mike Cannon, general manager operations at VicRelief + Foodbank, points out that relief is often given to people who never expected to need it. "It might be a 45-year-old former executive who took a redundancy package, paid off a few bills and expected to find a new job. But five years later, he hasn't found employment, the money has run out, there are bills to be paid and he can't afford to feed the family," says Cannon.

Victorian Relief and Foodbank Victoria merged in February. The result is an emergency relief resource centre for welfare agencies and community organisations that delivers a material aid program including food and household goods.

"As part of Foodbank Australia there are 25 major food companies in Australia who are donors; companies such as Unilever, Cadbury Schweppes, Goodman Fielder, Fonterra, Ardmona and SPC. They commit to donate excess stock, or distressed food stock (food that has been over-created, incorrectly packaged or is close to its best-before date)," says Cannon.

He says the biggest problem is supply of "staple" foods. The shelves at Foodbank's headquarters in Yarraville are filled with snacks and "non-essential items". "We have more biscuits and confectionery than we can use. But what we don't have enough of is canned food or the things that don't go off — rice, pasta, flour and cereal."

The organisation also receives donations from stallholders at Footscray Market, excess stock from Safeway's warehouse, and packaged food from Coles supermarkets. Cannon says that as the big supermarkets and larger manufacturers "concentrate on getting their logistics right, the availability of 'recycled' products will decrease. If we continue to rely on mistakes, that could be the biggest mistake that we make".

Another highly regarded Melbourne charity group working to help the homeless and hungry is One Umbrella.

This group was pivotal in the introduction of the 2002 Wrongs Act and has been operating for

continued overleaf

In the footsteps of an angel

A decent meal and friendly chat make a big difference to Melbourne's many homeless and disadvantaged, writes **Michael Lallo**, a Margaret Oats Soup Van volunteer.

"Mate, this is the first thing I've had all day," says Frank, a hulking figure clad in a blue fleece top, as he gulps down a cup of steaming vegetable soup.

Judging by the speed at which the crowd descends on the table in Collingwood's Smith Street, it seems Frank is not the only one who's waited until 8pm for breakfast.

Volunteers busily dole out more food. As always, all of it is eagerly received. While some onlookers appear bemused by this scene, most are familiar with the nightly ritual.

Over the course of a typical week, about 70 volunteers — from students and young professionals to retirees — will hand out thousands of sandwiches, cups of soup and pieces of fruit to the homeless and housing commission residents of Collingwood and Richmond.

The scheme is the formal continuation of the work of Margaret Oats. Until her death in 1998, the "Angel of Collingwood" was a familiar sight on these streets, distributing much-needed food and clothes from her trolley.

And as I quickly discovered when I signed up as a volunteer last year, a sympathetic ear is just as sought after as a sandwich.

Tonight, Frank wants to talk about his health problems. Myself and Laura, another volunteer, simply listen and nod, and he seems to relax after unloading his woes.

But then Laura breaks the news



that she's leaving to spend a year doing charity work overseas. Frank's face falls and he envelops her in a big bear hug. Only when she promises to write to him does he brighten.

As Laura says her goodbyes, the rest of us pack up and pile into two mini-vans, heading off to nearby housing commission units.

Kevin, a kindly man in his 50s, says this has been a particularly tough week. "Just ran out of money," he admits.

Matt is more upbeat, inviting us in to show off his guitar.

Karen and Tom, who look to be barely out of their teens, emerge from a fog of pot smoke to request their usual — tuna rolls and apples.

Jack, who suffers both cancer and Parkinson's disease, has a bowl ready for us to pour soup into. "Doc says I need to eat more vegies," he explains.

As we leave, Jack produces a jar of lollies, proud to be offering us something in return.

"Take another one for the road," he urges.

* Some names have been changed.



Frank and Laura on Smith Street, Collingwood (left); and soup van service (above).

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- **Second Bite** 0419 307 837, www.secondbite.org
- **VicRelief+Foodbank** 9362 8300, vrandfb.com.au
- **One Umbrella** 0419 307 837, oneumbrella.org.au

CHARITY AGENCIES

- **Prahan Mission:** 211 Chapel Street, Prahan, 9692 9500
- **St Mary's House of Welcome:** 165 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 9417 6497
- **Sacred Heart Mission:** 87 Grey Street, St Kilda, 9537 1166
- **Open Family:** 1/75 Crockford Street, Port Melbourne, 8698 6700
- **Brotherhood of St Laurence,** Coolibah Centre, 67 Fitzroy Street, Brunswick, 9483 1183

OTHER CONTACTS:

- **StreetSmart,** a pre-Christmas campaign in which restaurants request a \$2 donation be added to each table's bill. Melbourne participants include Bistro 1, Ezard, Lake House, Mecca and Verge. Phone 9209 9000.



continued from previous page

almost five years. The organisation is funded by private donations, philanthropic trusts and government subsidies. It rescued 41 tonnes of unwanted food in 2005, much of it from corporate sponsors.

The group's chief executive officer, Martin Cowling, says One Umbrella creates 250,000 meals a year — its goal is 800,000 meals. There are about 300 agencies delivering food in Victoria, he says, and about 50 agencies providing cooked meals in metropolitan Melbourne. But in rural areas, often the problem is more hidden — farmers might be struggling, but they help others and ignore their own needs.

"Our biggest concern as an organisation is how much we waste in Australia. If you took all of the food that we know is wasted in Victoria it would total 750,000 tonnes (worth about \$1.3 billion). That is about 100 times what is needed to meet demand," he says.

Mike Cannon of VicRelief + Foodbank.

PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS

Books

Lotus: Asian Flavours

By Teage Ezard
\$49.95 (Hardie Grant)

It is wise to be wary of any cookbook by a boundary-pushing professional chef that claims to be "simple" and "casual". When cookbook writers such as Donna Hay mention simple and casual, you know you'll be able to stagger around the kitchen with half a bottle of chardonnay under your belt and one eye on *Home and Away* and still emerge with something edible. But when someone like Teage Ezard uses the words — as he does here — it is time to put the wine down, turn off the TV and concentrate.

Lotus is Ezard's second book and takes its inspiration from both the street food of Thailand and



Malaysia and from Chinese dim sum. It is a pretty, well-designed book with atmospheric photos of Asian street-food scenes interspersed with full-page shots of many of the book's recipe pictures. The recipes are well laid out and easily legible, and all come with a hint, story or observation from Ezard as way of introduction.

Lotus is a simpler book than Ezard's first cookbook, *Ezard*, an unapologetically and deliberately serious tome for the advanced (and brave) home cook. But nonetheless your skill and confidence need to be high and your pantry well-stocked before trying any of the nearly 150 recipes on offer here.

Most of the recipes start with lengthy lists of ingredients that usually include a stock, paste, spice mix, batter, oil or syrup that has its own recipe in the Basics chapter at the back of the book. Many of the dishes are meant to be one small part of a larger banquet so the amount of work involved is daunting and you can understand why so many people go out for dim sum.

But for those up to the challenge, there is plenty of good stuff in *Lotus*, whether you are interested in classics such as Peking duck or are attracted to more genre-leaping dishes such as osso buco with wasabi potato dumplings.

MICHAEL HARDEN

Italy for the Gourmet Traveller

By Fred Plotkin
Simon and Schuster Australia, \$39.95

We envy Fred Plotkin; he is living the dream. The author of this chunky guidebook gives the impression that he does little but meander through the sunny, wine-soaked landscape nibbling here, sipping there and moving on to the next town. Plotkin, an American who also writes on opera and art, and lectures all over the world, says, "In the years that I have spent living and travelling in Italy, I have come to think of myself as a Garibaldi with a fork. I have slept and eaten in most of the towns he visited, and many he didn't, taking notes on everything I ate and drank." He divides the 720-page guide into regions and then towns, and strays far from the usual tourist trails. The foods, wines and specialities of each



town and city are given, along with its character and a brief history. This is followed by appraisals of individual restaurants, bars, cafes, food and bakeries with addresses, phone numbers if relevant, and opening times. Sprinkled throughout are 40 recipes that are not the usual fare of Italian cookbooks — such as prosciutto-wrapped shrimp, wine soup from Terlano and carrot cake. Although the emphasis is on artisan food, Plotkin pays attention to other pleasures of life. Festivals are itemised along with particularly good antiques shops, ceramics, linen stores and anything else that is notable for quality, rarity or regional value — a herb and honey house, for example, food museums and the last private stone olive press. Plotkin's style is warm, friendly and realistic.

BEVERLEY JOHANSON