



A Better World Cafe

by Leigh Davis

As the economy was in full nose-dive mode in 2009, some folks in Central Jersey were busy opening a brand-new café. Some might call such an enterprise foolhardy, but the people involved saw it as a necessary step in hard times, and even a harbinger of a new paradigm blending social service, community building, and social entrepreneurship.

A Better World Café—a non-profit “community kitchen” in Highland Park—was founded through a partnership of the grassroots community agency, Who Is My Neighbor, Inc. (WIMN) and the New Brunswick-based soup kitchen/ culinary school, Elijah’s Promise (EP). Monday through Friday, from 11 am to 3 pm, the “Quilt Room,”

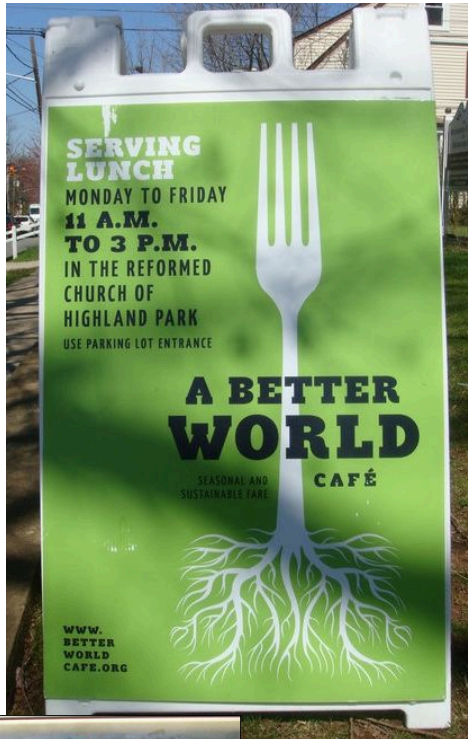
at The Reformed Church of Highland Park is transformed into a welcoming space with the smells of delicious sustainably-produced local fare served up by a staff of EP graduates and local volunteers.

The Café is based on a concept developed by Denise Cerrata, who founded Salt Lake City’s One World Everybody

Eats because she wanted to create a place where people could eat together and with dignity, regardless of their financial status. EP’s soup kitchen is known for providing healthy local fare in a dignified setting, and WIMN’s vision incorporates the desire to create “a world that uses care and kindness to turn strangers into neighbors,” so the community kitchen partnership seemed like a natural next step.

Meals are simple and reasonably priced in small, medium, and large sizes, so that you take how much you want to eat, which reduces waste. You can pay the “suggested price” or something different. Or you can volunteer an hour for your meal. Or you can select the complimentary meal.

“The cafe just celebrated our first anniversary and I’m so excited to be serving food and building community through A Better World Café,” said Head Chef Rachel Weston, who with Chef Roy Irwin, EP’s culinary school students



and the many volunteers, is there to make sure that your experience is fun and tasty.

Most days, the lunch hour is bustling, with a line out the door, which gives you time to chat up folks or study the gustatory delights—handwritten on the white board as you enter. Grab a tray, order up some soup, the popular Better World salad (made with kale and sesame oil), or a panini, and don’t forget the moist bread pudding, a vegan pumpkin cupcake or rich chocolate brownie and a cup of the house blend Fair Trade coffee.

More than 50 similar cafes are either open or in the planning stages in 26 states, Canada and Haiti. We hope the

idea continues to spread and provide more opportunities for jobs, good food and community-building. This is what we’re talkin’ about! ☺

www.betterworldcafe.org

www.whoismyneighbor.net

www.elijahspromise.net

www.oneworldeverybodyeats.org



Chef Rachel photos courtesy A Better World Café

