Author doing her part to put cheese on all plates

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Cheese is more than a food to Laura Werlin – it's a passion, almost an obsession. After all, her sixth book on the subject will be released in early December.

Lake Tahoe News caught up with the energetic author of all things cheese earlier this month before she gave a seminar called Belgian Brews and Artisan Cheese Pairing as part of the annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival at Northstar.



Laura Werlin

"I've loved cheese since I've had teeth," Werlin says. Her first memory of cheese is of single slices of American cheese on Wonder bread that was then grilled.

While her taste buds have evolved, her love of grilled cheese has not faded. In fact, in 2004 she published "Great Grilled Cheese" and in 2011 she came out with "Grilled Cheese, Please!"

"The All American Cheese and Wine Book" earned her a James Beard award.

She transitioned from being in the television news business to being a food writer to now being an author of cheese. American cheese is her focus.

Werlin’s initial goal with her books was to answer all the questions she had about cheese because she figured other people had those same questions.

What she discovered is many people find cheese to be intimidating. That’s why people stick with the same Brie or cheddar they’ve always had.

The industry is growing, with cheese now made in nearly every state.

“Unlike wine, you don’t need the perfect climate,” Werlin said. “It’s being made in remote and more urban places. Not every cheesemaker has animals. They buy the milk.”

With more people paying attention to where their food comes from, it’s now possible to buy local cheeses no matter what corner of the continent one calls home.

For her tasting at Northstar she brought a cheese from Aspen, another was from Holland.

Werlin likes that more and more farmers markets have cheese purveyors who allow shoppers to sample the goods. She says this breaks down barriers – which means cheese becomes less intimidating.

She embraces the European tradition of serving cheese after a meal instead of the American ritual of cheese as an appetizer.

Werlin said the problem with starting with cheese is “it’s filling and will impact your appetite.”

And cheese does not have to be expensive to be part of one’s repertoire. In Werlin’s book about macaroni and cheese she has two recipes that call for Velveeta.

“What matters to me is that cheese is made well and it tastes good,” Werlin said.

Homemade food bill on Brown’s desk

By Karen E. Klein, Bloomberg

Kristen Farrar would like to sell the cakes, scones and muffins she bakes, using figs, walnuts and citrus from farms near her home in Fresno. But the homeschooling mom of two can’t afford to rent commercial kitchen space or pay the $50,000 she estimates it would take to turn a shed on her property into a certified commercial kitchen, in which food for sale must be prepared under state law.

Farrar is hoping she won’t have to comply with the old rules because of new legislation – the California Homemade Food Act – that was approved last month and is awaiting Gov. Jerry Brown’s signature. It would allow home-based entrepreneurs to sell $35,000 to $50,000 annually in “non-potentially hazardous” foods such as breads, jams and candy.

If Brown signs the bill into law, California will become one of 32 states with cottage food laws, sometimes called “baker’s bills” because they often apply to home-baked goods. The financial crisis and recession have sparked the passage of 14

of these laws since 2008, many championed by would-be entrepreneurs motivated by pay cuts and layoffs.

They've also stirred concern, both from established business owners wary of competition and public health advocates concerned about food-borne illness.

Being able to sell the goodies she makes in her home kitchen would allow Farrar to test her products at farmers' markets and get onto shelves at local grocers and coffee shops. If her items prove popular, she says, she plans to upgrade to a commercial facility and expand production.

"Once you get your foot in the door and make a name for yourself, then that's when you can go out and get a shop – maybe three or four years down the road – and make a decent living," she says.

Read the whole story

Kids in U.S. eating nearly as much salt as adults

By Allison Aubrey, NPR

Yes, we love salt. It makes everything taste better. But as a society, we're eating way too much of it. And, so are our children.

A study from researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that children in the U.S. between the ages of 8 and 18 are eating, on average, 3,387 mg per day. That's about the same amount as adults. But it's a lot more than the 2,300 mg daily limit recommended by the federal

dietary guidelines.

And the result? Janelle Gunn, a public health analyst with the CDC, says it's pretty clear. "We found that higher sodium intake was associated with higher blood pressure," she says.

The association was strongest among children who were overweight. "We found among overweight and obese participants (in the study), that for every 1,000 mg of sodium they consumed, their blood pressure response was seven times greater (compared to healthy-weight children)," explains Gunn.

Overall, the researchers found that about 15 percent of the children in the study had high either elevated or high blood pressure. In adults, high blood pressure is considered a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Fresh ingredients make for special pizzas

By Kathryn Reed

I'm not sure if I could ever get tired of pizza. It's one of those foods where there are so many toppings, sauces and crust combos available that you would never have to have the same one twice.



But there is one we have with regularity in our household. It’s Sue’s pesto-spinach pie.

I make fresh batches of pesto this time of year and then freeze them so we can use them year-round.

We “cheat” on the crust by buying Boboli. But feel free to make your own.

For Sue’s pizza, she spreads a layer of pesto on the crust, covers it with thawed spinach, and then adds feta cheese, sliced olives, pine nuts and sun-dried tomatoes. I like marinated artichoke hearts on my half. Then she bakes the pizza at 450 degrees for 15 minutes.

I decided last weekend to try my hand with pizza – not the dough, though. I was a bit inspired by needing to find more uses for all the zucchini and eggplant that keep arriving in my community supported agriculture box.

I don’t have measurement because I just kept adding to the pan as I was cooking and I wanted to use all the veggies I had. I cooked enough veggies for two pizzas, with leftovers that were used the next day as part of a nacho topping.

I thinly sliced squash, eggplant and red onion.

I cooked these in butter and Madeira, and then added some of the oil from marinated artichokes. I made batches of the veggies; putting the cooked ones aside in a bowl. By the time I was done I had used a stick of butter.

Then I put all of the veggies back in the pan to toss them together to warm them and blend the flavors.

I brushed the pizza crust with a mixture of olive oil, minced

garlic and chopped fresh rosemary.

Then I put a single layer of the veggies onto the crusts. I also added marinated artichoke hearts that I had chopped.

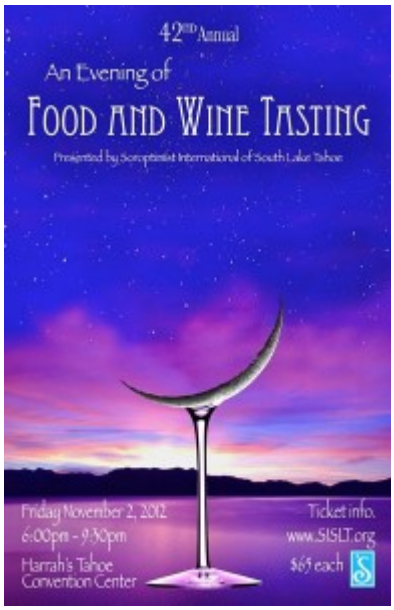
I baked each one separately at 450 degrees for 20 minutes.

Not only did the pizza pass muster with Sue and me, but a teenager devoured the second pizza. To me, that is the greatest compliment.

Local artist designs winning wine poster

Local art student Matt Kauffmann’s entry in the 42nd annual An Evening of Food and Wine Tasting poster contest will be featured on all promotional material.

It features a surreal blue-violet scene with a moon sliver as the bowl of a wine glass over Lake Tahoe. Kauffmann, who will receive his BFA from Sierra Nevada College next spring, received a $250 cash prize and two tickets to the wine event. He describes his original design as “radtastic” and says the recognition from Soroptimist is motivation to keep creating new work.



Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe's annual wine tasting is Nov. 2, 6-9:30pm at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

This year's event will showcase more than 18 area restaurants and 30 vintners.

Tickets are $65 each and can be purchased from any SISLT member or online. A $10 discount on a pair of tickets is being offered for purchases through Oct. 1.

Food waste being repurposed

By Alice Park, Time

Nearly 1.5 billion tons. That's how much spoiled and uneaten food people around the world throw out each year. In the U.S., roughly 40 percent of the food supply is wasted, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). But that kind of trash could soon become a lot more useful.

Building on efforts to turn grains and even human waste into biofuels and other valuable chemicals, Carol Lin, a biochemical engineer at the City University of Hong Kong, is developing a new kind of biorefinery. To head off a crisis at

Hong Kong's landfills—they're going to be full within five years—she and her team, in partnership with Starbucks and a number of recycling groups, are converting organic food waste (think old pastries, bread and coffee grounds) into succinic acid. That chemical is a key component of biodegradable plastics, and is used in everything from laundry-detergent bottles to food additives to car parts.

The implications for the environment are huge. Succinic acid is currently made from petrochemicals in a process that leaves a harmful carbon footprint, and the U.S. Department of Energy has listed the chemical as one of a dozen that could be made more responsibly through bio-based processes. Although Lin's program is still in the pilot phase, companies in Europe, Asia and the U.S. are launching similar efforts to turn wasted food into a potentially valuable commodity. Lin is confident that the cost of the processing—it doesn't require any specialized tools—will make it a viable method for producing the acid.

She faces plenty of hurdles. Because food waste isn't as easy to transport (unlike petroleum, it starts to rot), researchers are still figuring out how to set up hygienic ways to process it quickly. Then there's the issue of scale: in her lab, Lin generates 81 kg of succinic acid from each ton of food waste she processes – a tiny fraction of the 44,000 tons manufacturers demand each year. But, says Allen Hershkowitz of NRDC, it's essential to keep trying. "No single undertaking is going to address all the waste we generate." But if this one can make good use of your stale muffin, that's a big step in the right direction.

Low and slow – the best approach to dieting

By Patti Neighmond, NPR

If you're dieting, you know you've got to count calories, carbs and fats. But if you really want to take off the weight and keep it off, you might want to pay more attention to the glycemic index, which is essentially a measure of how quickly foods are digested.

That's because high glycemic foods cause a surge in blood sugar, followed by a crash. That biological reaction releases hormones that stimulate hunger and, according to David Ludwig of the New Balance Foundation Obesity Prevention Center at Boston Children's Hospital, actually lower metabolism, adding up to a dismal recipe for people who want to lose weight and keep it off.

"One of the unfortunate aspects of weight loss maintenance is that it takes fewer and fewer calories to just stay the same," Ludwig says. "As the body loses weight, it becomes more efficient and requires fewer calories," making it harder and harder to continue losing and making it difficult to maintain weight loss without continually dieting. By some estimates, only 1 in 6 Americans who lose weight are able to keep it off after one year.

But Ludwig and colleagues recently published a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association that offers some tools you might use to fight back. Researchers compared the low-carb, low-fat and low-glycemic diets to see which one burned the most calories per day. The low-carb diet was the clear winner. The low-fat diet was the loser. But it was the diet in the middle, the low-glycemic index diet, that Ludwig suggests is more promising. It burned more calories per day

than the low-fat diet and proved easier to stick to over the long term than the low-carb diet.

Mike Rogers, 43, was a participant who managed to keep off the 40 pounds he lost. He says the difference in the three diets was “enormous,” adding that “the low-glycemic diet reminded me of the way my mom and grandmom cooked while I was growing up; I felt far better on the low-glycemic diet than on either of the other two.”

Still trim, Rogers now eats far more fruits and vegetables than he did in the past, and, when it comes to carbohydrates, he opts for those with a lower glycemic index. That means brown rice versus white, whole grain pasta and steel cut oats instead of “quick-cooking” oats. He pretty much stays away from all processed foods.

Highly processed and refined foods, like packaged items, white bread, white rice, prepared breakfast cereals and crackers have a high glycemic index. “The body can digest these foods into sugar literally within moments after eating,” says Ludwig.

Low-glycemic foods tend to be natural foods like most vegetables and fruits, nuts, beans and whole grains. They actually wend their way slowly through the body’s digestion system, using up more energy and burning more calories in the process. And, best of all, says Ludwig, they actually “increase the metabolic rate and decrease hunger, giving us a biological advantage” in losing and maintaining weight.

Read the whole story

Winning vodka comment means 2 tickets to cocktail contest

Bob Fleischer is going to the Sept. 13 Cocktail Contest put on by the Barton Health Foundation.



This was his winning entry, “A long time ago I did some experimenting with vodka drinks for two huge punch bowls at a family affair. It was a toss-up as to which was better,of the two recipes I came up with. One had a lot of fresh grapefruit juice; but the one below was the favorite: 1 part each vodka, orange juice, and cherry brandy.”

The Sept. 13 event is from 5:30-8pm at Riva Grill in South Lake Tahoe. Ten bartenders will compete for the best drink of the night.

If you didn’t win, tickets are $25 each in advance or $30 at the door.

McDonald’s to open vegetarian restaurants in India

By April Fulton, NPR

McDonald’s, home of the iconic Big Mac, is going vegetarian. Well, at least in India, where 20 to 42 percent or more of the population (depending on how you count) eschews meat, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization.

According to AFP, McDonald’s will open its first vegetarian-only location next year near the Golden Temple, a pilgrimage site sacred to Sikhs located in the city of Amritsar in northern India. There is no meat allowed in the temple (or smoking or alcohol, for that matter.)

This isn’t exactly the first time McDonald’s is breaking into the Indian market.

“At the moment, India is still a very small market – we just have 271 restaurants in India, and across the world, we have nearly 33,000,” a spokesman for McDonald’s in northern India, Rajesh Kumar Maini, told AFP.

But it’s a growth opportunity for the chain, the spokesman says.

The reasons for going meatless in India are obvious: Cows are sacred to Hindus, and the country’s Muslims don’t eat pork. That leaves a lot of chicken and vegetables to be served in McDonald’s existing Indian restaurants.

McDonald’s in India already has a menu that is 50 percent vegetarian, according to Yahoo News. At 28 rupees, or 50 cents, each, its McAloo Tikki burger– which uses a spicy, fried potato-based patty – is the top seller, accounting for a quarter of total sales. And you won’t find a Big Mac in India, just a Maharaja Mac, which involves chicken patties, notes Business Insider.

The company is also planning to open another vegetarian location near the Vaishno Devi cave shrine in Kashmir, a Hindu pilgrimage site that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors a year.

So how’s the new all-vegetarian version of McDonald’s going to play in India? We can only guess, although from China to France, the mega chain has a history of successfully adjusting its brand abroad to suit the locals.

Coffee takes out neck kinks for computer workers

By My Health News Daily

If your job is a literal pain in the neck, drinking coffee may help, a study from Norway says.

People who drank coffee before sitting down to work at a computer for 90 minutes reported less pain in their necks and shoulders than those who didn’t drink coffee, according to the study. Some in the study had previously suffered chronic neck and shoulder pain, while other participants hadn’t — but people in both groups who drank coffee reported less pain, the researchers said.

Among people whose daily work involves low levels of muscle activity, such as sitting at a computer all day, about 10 percent report shoulder and neck pain, according to the study.

The researchers looked at 48 people, including 22 with chronic neck or shoulder pain, and 26 healthy people. The experiment was part of research on how pain develops during office work; it was not intended to look at the effects of caffeine, the researchers said.

People in the study reported to the laboratory first thing in the morning, so to offset any effects of sleepiness, coffee and tea were available. Nineteen of the study participants chose to drink either coffee or tea, but were instructed not to drink more than one cup.

Then, for 90 minutes, participants performed a computer task, using only a mouse.

Researchers found that people who drank coffee – whether they had previous chronic pain or not – developed less pain over the course of the 90 minutes, compared with those who didn’t drink coffee. And at the end of the computer task, the coffee drinkers rated their pain as less intense than the other study participants.

It’s possible the reduction in pain experienced by coffee and tea drinkers in the study was due to other traits or lifestyle behaviors common to people in this group. Future studies should be conducted in which participants are randomly assigned to consume caffeine or not in order to better understand whether the caffeine itself is truly reducing pain, the researchers said.

The study, conducted by researchers at the Sunnaas Rehabilitation Hospital in Norway, was published Sept. 3 in the journal BMC Research Notes.