



GreenSpace Café: My Journey from the Cardiology Lab to the Kitchen

By Joel Kahn, MD
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Over 25 years ago, I embarked on a career as an invasive cardiologist skilled in placing first balloons and then stents in every nook, cranny, and granny that needed them. That single focus lasted only three weeks, because then Dr. Dean Ornish published the [Lifestyle Heart Trial](#), which showed that the diet I had been eating for over a decade could reverse heart symptoms and plaque. My career quickly transitioned to one of both interventional procedures and nutritional consultations with patients. Today, I have retired the balloons and stents and offer only heart disease treatment and reversal programs, using plant-based nutrition as the foundation.

Over the years, I'd be asked to address real-life challenges from my patients who had watched *Forks Over Knives* and were embarking on plant-based diets. The most common questions were *Who else eats this way?* and *Where can we eat out with friends but still follow our heart disease program?*

The First Step: A Plant-Based Nutrition Support Group

To help with the first question, I co-founded a plant-based nutrition support group in Detroit that has now grown to over 1,000 members (www.pbns.org). Our monthly meetings provide information from noted speakers local and distant, a forum for answering questions (Why no added oils?), and local friendships/community. To help with the second question, the group arranged for some whole-food, plant-based menus at local Detroit restaurants. Because most of these eateries also served dairy and meat, the comfort level was not complete.

The Next Step: A Whole-Food, Plant-Based Restaurant Concept

I wanted to do more to help people interested in eating out healthfully. About two years ago, my oldest son Daniel and I decided to tackle this project using his MBA and interest in vegan nutrition. After reviewing some franchises and discussing options with several local

restaurateurs, we decided to create our own concept without compromise. A small restaurant in Ferndale, Michigan came on the market, and we grabbed it at the end of 2014. We gutted the place and designed a kitchen for our chef Steve Weller, equipped with special ovens for producing gourmet oil-free vegan entrees, but no fryers. Then when the owner of the store next door died suddenly, we decided to double our space with a lounge and some retail space.

[GreenSpace Café](#) now seats well over 100 guests, ballooning to 150 when the patio opens, and is completely plant-based (vegan). It's a welcoming café with gourmet handcrafted foods featuring organic herbs and spices. All products are certified organic or grown by local farmers we know are using organic practices. Our connections with local farmers are strong, and we design our menu based on their growing seasons and output. The menu has many items that are gluten- or soy-free, and we offer many entrees with no added oils, welcoming followers of Dr. Esselstyn, Dr. Ornish, and other leaders in the field of heart disease reversal.

2015 has been a long year with a few challenging moments. None of that matters now, when I see people of all ages and diets enjoying meals that are truly healthy and also friendly to animals and the environment. Throughout November we have had soft openings, and the response has been enthusiastic from vegans and omnivores alike.

For me, this is a dream come true. It's been over 25 years since I performed my first angioplasty and learned that healthy eating can reverse heart disease—and now I get to introduce new generations to delicious, beautiful food that also promotes real health. While I still direct my heart attack prevention center daily, GreenSpace Café is my lab for health and wellness that will keep generations away from the hospital.

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