

Chef insists kitchen be stocked with locally grown products

By Kathryn Reed

Having the food source close by has always been important to chef-restaurant owner Mark Estee. Now it's even closer.

With the opening of Campo in Reno this fall, this is where he spends the bulk of his time.



Mark Estee

Estee made a name for himself when Moody's opened in Truckee nearly 10 years ago. That eatery has since been sold to the owner of the Truckee Hotel, and is undergoing a remodel and a bit of a menu change.

Then came Baxter's at the Village at Northstar in fall 2008. With Vail Resorts taking over operations of the ski resort and village, Estee walked away from that venture. The folks at Vail now run it.

(That's too bad, because the experience at the restaurant last week left two *Lake Tahoe News* reporters wishing we'd eaten elsewhere. The food was average, the service so-so. But that was better than the service the family next to us got. Their server up and quit, kids didn't get fed, and the adults took everyone elsewhere.)

While *Lake Tahoe News* has not been to Campo, Moody's under Estee's leadership was this reporter's favorite restaurant in the greater Lake Tahoe area.

Estee's philosophy toward food is to bring the freshest products – aka locally grown – to the tables of his restaurants. Being in Reno gets him even closer to growers.

"I'm active as I've ever been in the farming community," Estee told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He is working with Great Basin Food Coop and is fighting to save Wolf Pack Meat. The latter, on the campus of UNR, is threatened with closure by the university. It is the only meat processing plant run by students.

"I think things are moving toward casual, more price friendly dining," Estee said of how things have changed in the restaurant business through the years.

Campo is following that trend. And with the desire to use local ingredients, the menu is always changing. Estee also owns Burger Me!, which has locations in Truckee and Reno.

Estee's prowess in the kitchen will be on show during the annual Chefs' Holidays at the Ahwahnee in Yosemite. He will give demonstrations Jan. 11-12.