

Global Taste, at a Local Place

A young man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light blue t-shirt and a backpack, is standing at a food cart. He is looking down at something in his hands. The cart has a metal frame and a counter. On the counter, there are some food items, including a green mug and a brown container. The background is blurred, showing other people and colorful geometric patterns on the cart's structure.

Library Mall food carts have been providing quality cuisine at student-friendly prices since the 1970s.

Photo Credit: Jeff Miller
Layout design by Xiumei Dong & Jack Treacy

2011 Food Cart Review Final Ranking

Vendor Name

- 1 Ingrid's Lunch Box
- 2 FIB'S - Fine Italian Beef & Sausage
- 3 Buraka East African Cuisine
- 4 Johnson Brothers Coffee
- 5 Santa Fe Trailer
- 6 Curt's Gourmet Popcorn
- 7 El Burrito Loco
- 8 Zen Sushi
- 9 Natural Juice
- 10 Teriyaki Samurai
- 11 Ernie's Kettle Korn
- 12 Caracas Empanadas
- 13 Surco Peruvian Grill
- 14 Madison Sourdough
- 15 Dandelion Vegetarian Foods
- 16 Banzo
- 17 Café Costa Rica
- 18 Lao Laan - Xang
- 19 Taste of Jamaica
- 20 Wei's Food to Go

Food Carts root in Madison Tradition

*A tradition of homemade foods
serve with warm peronality.*

In the late 1970s, a food cart named *Loose Juice* first appeared on the State Street Mall (also known as Library Mall). For more than 30 years, cart owner Karleton Armstrong has worked in this cart and handed countless smoothie drinks to Madison students. However, few know he was one of the *New Year's Gang* who is responsible for bombing Sterling Hall 40 years ago, , according to the Wisconsin Alumni association.

Following with the success of *Loose Juice*, several other food carts also joined the street vending team at Library Mall. In the 1980s, a larger variety of food was offered by the venders such as the *Jin's Chicken & Fish* food cart, which served African and American cuisines and the *Fresh Cold Drinks* food cart, which sold fresh fruits and drinks.

Gradually, these food carts have become part of Madison's culture that offers eaters an array of lunchtime options every weekday. Everything from curries

and burritos to kettle corn and smoothies, food carts are brought together on this campus area and provide a global taste to the students with top quality.

Today, there are more than 20 food carts at the Library Mall and many of the food carts have been there for numerous years.

"I started the car ten years ago," said Martin Deacon, owner of the *Taste of Jamaica* food cart. Sean Lee, the owner of *Wei's To Go* food cart also said that he has owned the food carts for seven years and the previous owner of the food cart has been selling food at the Library Mall for 20 years.

With their long history, food carts have consistently served good food to students at a very affordable price. According to Warren Hansen, the city's street vending coordinator, because of the popular demand of street food, increasing numbers of food carts have made it hard to find spots for new carts within the city's designated vending areas.



Warren Hansen
Street Vending Coordinator

Before 1987, the food carts were not well regulated and there was no formal record kept. Later, in the 1990s, the City of Madison made a decision to prohibit the food carts from mass-production. The city encourages the food cart vendors to be original with their food carts and foods by having annual food cart review contests.

"The quality of the food is better than it's ever been. Because of the competitive nature, it's necessary to have good food and a good looking car," said Hansen. He explained that the biggest changes for the food carts were the quality of the food and the look of the food cart.

One of the food carts, *Ingrid's Lunch Box LLC*, was even awarded the Best Street Food in the U.S.A. in San

Francisco during the 2008 San Francisco Street Food Festival.

Haosen Gu, a UW-Madison senior, loves to eat at the *Surco Peruvian* food cart at the Library Mall because of the great tasting food.

"I have tried every dishes on the menu and all of them taste good," he said. Because of his regular visit to the *Surco Peruvian* food cart, Haosen even became friend with the food cart owner.

For most of the food carts owner, they prefer to have their food carts at the Library Mall as the owner of the *Wei's To Go* food carts, Sean Lee said, "according to the point I will be in downtown, but we prefer to stay here because I love the students."

According to the food cart owners, some of them are also operating a restaurant that serves similar type of cuisines as of the food served at their food cart. However, the food cart offers same quality of food as the restaurant at much cheaper price. The price range of the food sold at the food carts range from about a dollar to eight dollars. The food vendor believes that they would attract more costumers to their restaurant by serving good quality food at food carts.

The carts don't operate year-round. When winter hits, the carts go into

storage and many of the carts owners work on a part-time job or have a vacation.

"Usually our schedule is go by the student, when the students take vacation, we take vacation too," said Sean Lee. Lee believes that operating a food cart gives him more flexible hours.

More food carts are operating during the winter each year now because of the popularity of the street food. How-

ever operating a food cart is not that easy, vendors describe the experience as "going camping every-day," since the preparation and operation times might take nine to ten hours.

When Spring is on its way to Madison, food carts are back to business again. As the sun shines through the clouds in the sky, one of the best way to enjoy Madison Spring or Summer is to sit around the Library Mall area and enjoy the delicious food prepared from the food carts and the nice weather outside.

- By Xiumei Dong



Smoothies



Japanese



Jamaican



Thai

Location:
Library Mall & Capital Square

Hours:
Mon-Fri 10:30am-2:30pm,
Sat 10:30am-1:30pm,
closed Sun.

Food carts