By Kristie Snyder, GreenLeaf Editor



GreenStar's deli is far from traditional, but with a new focus on local, fresh and handmade interpretations of classic dishes from around the globe, the Delicatessen @ GreenStar joins a long line of eateries that feel like home to their patrons.

The American deli was born out of the simple longing of a people for their comfort food. As Eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in the cities of the Northeast in the late 1800s, they brought with them their homemade recipes and created an institution — the deli. Some of these ancestral delis, such as the famous Katz's, which opened on the Lower East Side of New York City in 1888, are still here today, and the idea of "the deli" has thoroughly permeated American cuisine.

The GreenStar deli's new menu does include some of those traditional Jewish deli foods — knishes, corned beef – while encompassing simple, seasonal and handmade food from many traditions. Whatever culinary background you hail from, whatever the cuisine you crave, whether you're a hardcore vegan or dedicated carnivore, you'll find something to love in GreenStar's deli.

The revamped menu is largely the work of new Deli Manager Erik Lucas. A graduate of the Natural Gourmet Institute in New York City, Erik joined GreenStar as a member on the first day he set foot inside the co-op. Many of the new dishes came out of his desire to bring in more whole foods, fresh, seasonal vegetables, and local products. "The new menu is really food that represents GreenStar and our values," he says. "I feel it's important to keep a connection to your food — where it's coming from, who's making it, and why it's important to support them," he adds. He envisions someday working with local farmers to source products grown specifically for the needs of the deli.

While you might have noticed some new menu additions in the past weeks and months, most of the new offering will be introduced during March. Keep your eyes open for special samplings of new dishes over the course of the month as recipes are unveiled.

At the sandwich counter, an updated menu brings in street-food traditions from around the world. The Vietnamese banh mi sandwich, available in vegan and chicken versions, has quickly become a customer favorite, and it's joined by international brethren such as the Indian tea sandwich and falafel (both vegan). For traditionalists, a "build your own grilled cheese" option will appeal — choose your bread, cheese and fillings and it will be grilled to order. Local beef, corned in the deli kitchen, will appear in the classic Reuben. The pizza has been updated, too, prepared now with a chewy grilled crust and set topping menus.

The soup menu leans toward healthy versions of old favorites: New England clam chowder, Italian farro and kale soup, Tuscan bean and vegetable. (The Greek lemon chicken was recently cited by the Ithaca Times' restaurant critic as one of his favorite soups.) The summer will bring local gazpacho and chilled potato-leek soup. Soups will be packaged for sale in the grab-and-go, too, if you want to enjoy them at home.

Other new grab-and-go additions will include dragon bowls, pre-packed meals-to-go with homemade sauces and dressings. The grab-and-go case is also the place to look for knishes and Jamaican beef patties, a local (Engelbert Farms) version of a beloved street food featuring seasoned beef baked inside a flaky pastry crust. Pickle-lovers have been eagerly gobbling down dilly beans, giardiniera and pickled beets, and soon they can nosh on homemade sauerkraut and kimchi.

On the hot bar, Sunday brunch will include local sausage gravy and biscuits, congee (rice porridge) and frittatas made with local ingredients, and you'll find cold breakfast options on the other side of the bar — GreenStar-made granola, local yogurt and cut fruit.

In the deli service case, look for new, locally sourced dishes like freekeh salad, made with Cayuga Pure Organics' freekeh, a roasted spelt grain popular in the Middle East. Yes, your old favorites are still there (that means you, lovers of macro greens, spanikopita and chipotle potato salad).

"Food that makes people feel comfortable and welcome and at home is very important to me," Erik says. "In my family, growing up, meals were very important — food was always an event." Now that he's a parent himself, food remains a focus. Erik, who lives with his wife, Moira Haupt, on Ithaca's South Hill, says that their children, Stella, 5, and Isaac, 3, "love eating, especially at the GreenStar Deli! They're pretty adventurous, and they eat a lot of sushi."