



LOCAL COOKBOOKS

WORDS SARA STOVALL

You've answered calls to "eat local" and "shop local"—and with this year's release of two Sarasota-centric recipe books, now you can "cook local," too! One reads like a stirring memoir, another like an essential travel guide; the photography makes both worthy of coffee table centerpiece status. These cookbooks promise to delight Sarasota-loving epicures and home chefs. Do you know any who have been especially good this year?

Reflections & Recipes of Chef Judi

The name Judi Gallagher signifies celebrity chef, culinary columnist, PR maven, television personality, and compassionate activist.

In *Reflections & Recipes of Chef Judi*, Gallagher extends an open invitation to study the kind of life that shapes an extraordinary woman. From New England Clam Chowder to Raspberry Guava Bars, treasured recipes map a journey that's perhaps surprisingly gritty to those who know Gallagher as a beacon of pure warmth: a childhood shadowed by her father's mental illness; the sudden death of her 30-year-old sister; the sabotage of her second restaurant. Each time Gallagher arrives at a crossroads of tragedy and grief, her connection to food shows the way forward to healing and wholeness.

Gallagher's recipes flavor many victorious and bright memories, too: rising above

rampant sexism in the culinary profession; raising her son, Eric, Gallagher's "most precious creation yet"; falling for her husband, Paul—and not long after, for the city of Sarasota, where she fully ascended to star status. The one recipe conspicuously missing from this cookbook holds the secret to the oatmeal raisin cookies that lifted Gallagher back up during her darkest hour.

"I've already started book number two, but you'll never get the oatmeal raisin cookie recipe. Only my son Eric will," she vows.

Even without the miraculous oatmeal cookies, Gallagher's *Reflections & Recipes* reveals much about the qualities of an indomitable spirit, one with an enormous

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capacity for love and a great gift for expressing it through food. If feeding others feeds your soul, then you’re sure to resonate with Gallagher’s story of finding self-care in the kitchen, transforming her own healing process into a way to nurture those around her.

“This is much more than a cookbook. It’s a self-help book,” Gallagher says. “I debated whether to fill it with recipes and reasons why carrying on traditions in handwritten recipes from your family and friends is so important. But something spoke to me to tell my story, because my story is survival through cooking. I decided that I need to write it now, and if it helps one person, that’s more important to me than anything.”

Simply Sarasota: From Fresh to Fabulous

Can’t get enough of Chef Judi? Just open the cover of the Junior League of Sarasota’s (JLS) new cookbook to find a glowing foreword signed by Gallagher herself. As an international charitable organization, the Junior League carries on a rich history in cookbook publication. For decades, League members have contributed recipes to their chapters’ unique cookbook projects, drawing on culinary heritage to raise funds that fuel social reform missions.

In fact, *From Fresh to Fabulous* is the fourth recipe compendium produced by the JLS and the second volume in what may become a Simply Sarasota boxed set one day! The first edition debuted in 2007 as *Simply Sarasota: Creatively Casual Cuisine*. Lea Graf, a passionate home cook with an impressive cookbook collection of her own, spearheaded the initiative for an updated cookbook that reflects today’s fervor for local produce, unprocessed ingredients, and all the colors of the rainbow. Kathryn Brass-Piper brings the latter to life with an extra helping of eye-popping photos throughout the volume.

What’s more, this edition celebrates Sarasota with descriptions of landmarks

and attractions to accompany each chapter, as well as recipes from members of the culinary community and local food system who put this town on the map. Granny’s Potato Salad, from Jones Potato Farm, is a picnic-perfect classic you can whip up in minutes; if you want to work like a professional chef, take the Lemongrass Teriyaki-Glazed Salmon with Mussels and Thai Eggplant Stew from Michael’s on East for a whirl. JLS members triple-tested each recipe for accessibility and deliciousness, so you’re guaranteed to find a winner on every page.

The slow-cooker chapter holds special significance. The JLS has made food insecurity in Sarasota County the focus of its current efforts, partnering with All Faiths Food Bank to offer slow-cooker classes at local child and family resource centers as part of a hunger-ending crusade. These classes furnish low-income families with a programmable slow-cooker, a recipe book, and a supply of groceries to make complete, nutritious meals at home.

“That’s the purpose of selling these books: to do good things in the community,” Graf says. 🍷

Where to Find a Copy

Reflections & Recipes of Chef Judi is available online on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Simply Sarasota: From Fresh to Fabulous can be purchased on the Junior League of Sarasota’s e-store (www.jlsarasota.org/estore) or at the following partner locations:

- Blasé Café
- Bookstore1Sarasota
- Clever Cup Coffee Shop
- Garden Argosy
- Hana Sushi Lounge
- Marie Selby Garden Shop
- Molly’s: A Chic & Unique Boutique
- Morton’s Gourmet Market
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