

# The Mercury News

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## Valley Life: Circle the wagons, it's all you can eat

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Columnist

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Penny Warner's column is moving to a new home in the Valley Journal and Times Herald beginning Thursday, Nov. 3. The new weekly papers serving the Tri-Valley appear in each Thursday's paper.

The main reason my husband and I like to travel is not so much to visit distant relatives, check out famous museums or see the local sights. No, we go to eat.

Wherever we are, we love to tour the regional restaurants and taste local delicacies, everything from Texas chow to Wisconsin cheese, from New York egg creams to Gilroy garlic ice cream. It's all about the food.

When we heard that the Food Truck Phenom would be invading the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, we decided to check it out. Instead of spending all that money on gas traveling throughout the country for a taste of the nation -- even the world -- we figured we could find it all in one place (other than a shopping mall food court, that is).

We sort of knew what to expect after watching "The Great Food Truck Race" reality show on TV, which always left us drooling: invite friends so we could order a variety of foods and share bites. After arranging to meet Ann Parker, Colleen Casey and Staci McLaughlin, and Staci's two kids, Jake and Connor, we headed for the fairgrounds.

We paid the \$8 parking fee and \$3 entry fee, and then found ourselves in a wonderland of mouthwatering aromas. Trucks that had once hauled mail, carried overnight packages, and even bussed

schoolchildren now were painted, given festive names and turned into mobile mini-kitchens. They'd circled like wagon trains, surrounding the grassy

picnic area to await hungry customers.

It took us nearly 30 minutes to check out all 20 trucks and to peruse the various tempting menus. We had to make some tough decisions. Should we sample Chairman Bao's pork belly buns, or go for the Lobster Shack's lobster mac and cheese? We'd heard good things about Nom Nom's Vietnamese tacos, but the tikka masala burrito beckoned from the next truck over.

Those were just the main course items. What would we do when it came time for dessert? Would we head for Twisted Chill's soft-serve ice cream, Sunshine Susan's Solar Ice Cream sundaes, Sweet Constructions chocolate crackle cookies or That's Sweet whoopee pies?

We split up, each heading for a truck. Overwhelmed, I made my first stop at the wine vendor for a plastic cup of chardonnay to whet my palate -- as if it needed whetting. The weather was perfect, and strolling past the crazy, colorful trucks, inhaling the fragrant odors of food cooking, was a slice of heaven.

We met at the picnic table to cut up and share our finds, while the kids played on the grass and listened to the live music. After sampling everything, I couldn't remember what I ate or which truck it came from, but it was all good.

I barely had enough room left in my stomach for a Zantac, let alone dessert. We resolved to come back again when the trucks returned to the fairgrounds.

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