

SUSTAINABLE MONTREAL

Green lunches for the urban core

BRETT BUNDALE
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The Green Panther starts his work late at night.

The tofu steaks are marinated, the beans soaked and the fresh organic vegetables washed. Then, before dawn, he cuts, chops, cooks and spices to perfection.

By noon, the Green Panther has packed all the food into a cooler strapped onto the back of his bike and he begins delivering lunches door to door.

Montreal's first completely organic meals on wheels lunch service, the Green Panther, is back in full swing after a winter hibernation. In addition to delivering vegan food to doorsteps, this month, the Green Panther opened a small lunch bar on St. Viateur St.

"We needed a break over the winter to come back stronger," said Haim Shoham, the creator of the Green Panther. "We're just starting to scratch the surface of the potential market."

The Green Panther delivers "good food for the urban jungle" to offices, homes, hair salons and spas. So far most customers are in the Mile End and Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhoods, but Shoham hopes to expand the Green Panther's tracks across the island.

"I started delivering again in May and people are really digging it," Shoham said. "I mean the first time I went into Lululemon, they were like: 'Oh, it's vegan and organic healthy food, it's just fantastic,' and they clicked into the idea right away. But with others it took more time. I would leave them a business card and once they saw the website they trusted me more."

Green Panther lunches come in ecological packaging and are delivered on bikes. The sandwiches come in recyclable brown paper bags and the salads are packaged in 100 per cent biodegradable containers made from corn.

In addition, everything on the menu is organic and locally sourced whenever possible.

"The tofu is from a local Chinese family that has a really small factory near downtown," Shoham said. "The tempeh



Haim Shoham is the founder and owner of The Green Panther, a company that delivers fresh, organic and affordable lunches to Montreal businesses by bicycle. NATASHA FILLION THE GAZETTE

is from a family business just outside Ottawa. The pita is from Pita Royal, just off Décarie Blvd. And of course I make an effort to get the vegetables from Quebec when things are in season."

The menu includes pita sandwiches made from tempeh, an Indonesian-style fermented soy bean, tofu steaks and veggie burgers.

"We use what is more like an Israeli pita, which is a bit thicker than a normal pita, so it's nice for sandwiches because it holds the ingredients better," Shoham said.

For those with a sweet tooth, the Green Panther delivers organic fruit, maple-coated nuts and energy balls sweetened with agave plant nectar.

The Green Panther also has special-order items, including what Shoham describes as "the best falafel in the world."

"It's a recipe from my neighbour in Israel," Shoham said. "She had one of the most successful falafel businesses in my hometown, Rehovot, and she

wouldn't give anyone the recipe for the longest time. Then a couple of years back she gave the recipe to my mom before she passed away. So she passed on the legacy to us," Shoham said.

The falafel recipe includes vegetables, chickpeas, onions, garlic and lots of spices.

"But I can't give away the secret," he said.

Last year the meals on wheels startup was run out of a small space rented from a church.

"Now we can offer a greater variety of vegan delights from our lunch bar," he said, adding that the Green Panther also hopes to nab more catering contracts in its second season.

"I definitely want to expand the business beyond the meals on wheels concept."

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