



Critter-free cooking

Seward resident brings vegan show to the web

By TARA BANNOW

With its sunny, modest kitchen, charming living room and a medley of rescued animals frolicking across the wooden floors, Meagan Holtgrewe's Seward home might seem an unlikely spot to host a cooking show. But, then again, few things about the show are typical of the genre.

Rhymes With Vegan, (a play on the pronunciation of Holtgrewe's first name) is an exclusively online cooking show promoting the vegan lifestyle — cooking without the use of meat or dairy products. Holtgrewe, the creator, host and chef, said she hopes her show will “demystify” common misconceptions about veganism and make the diet more accessible to the public.

She hopes to produce one new show each month. Two episodes have “aired” since its debut in November; the next one, filmed on Dec. 13, features two different takes on chili: “Mom’s red chili” and a vegan white “chicken” chili.

“It’s gonna be cold; people will be looking for comfort food,” Holtgrewe said. “These chilis will stick to your bones, and they’re flavorful.”

The chili episode, expected to appear on www.rhymeswithvegan.com, in mid-January, will join two other episodes on the website, in



Two types of vegan chili to warm you this winter. (See recipes on facing page.) Photo by Karl Goodnough

addition to its constantly updated blog of recipes, colorful photos, tips and links to like-minded organizations.

The show itself is unique, utilizing ambient music, playful camera tricks and the artsy approach of scribbling the menu on pieces of cardboard beforehand. With her neighborly Minnesotan accent and informal, personable style of dress and language, Holtgrewe's animated on-screen presence ranks high on the likeability scale.

“Meagan’s got a great personality, and she’s just a fun person to watch,” said Charlotte Cozzetto, president of the Animal Rights Coalition (ARC), which sponsors *Rhymes With Vegan*. The group — which shares an office at 2615 E. Franklin Ave. with animal-free products retailer Fast and Furlless — is dedicated to ending the abuse and exploitation of animals, a mission that aligns naturally with Holtgrewe's.

“It’s interesting, it’s colorful,” Cozzetto said of the show. “It’s

much more fun to watch than one person just standing there talking and chopping.”

Home cooking, family style

It all began when Holtgrewe, a vegetarian for 15 years but a relatively new vegan, got an email from a friend with a YouTube clip of a cooking show. She decided to try it. Luckily, her brother, Gregg Holtgrewe — a local filmmaker and founder of Wholecrue Productions — agreed to donate his equipment and expertise to film the show. In fact, Holtgrewe said much of the show's production is done with the help of friends and family.

“It’s very grassroots,” she said. “You find a friend and say, ‘Can you hold the boom?’ It’s exciting to have them be a part of it.”

Holtgrewe said that, while she's been offered bigger, better kitchens to film in, she doesn't anticipate moving the show from her home anytime soon.

“This is how I think most people live,” she said. “You just gotta make do with what you have.”

No twigs, berries or rubber turkeys

For its Thanksgiving episode, *Rhymes With Vegan* put together a feast that incorporates all the



Meagan Holtgrewe prepares “Mom’s red chili” for an upcoming episode of *Rhymes with Vegan*. Photo by Karl Goodnough

family favorites, but vegan-style. There was Grandpa Earl's stuffing, Mom's scalloped corn, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes and gravy, a baguette with herbed butter and cranberries. The episode included a segment on choosing a faux-meat turkey substitute. After a taste-test between “tofurkey” and Celebration Roast, (a wheat-gluten meat substitute made by the Field Roast Grain Meat Company), Holtgrewe recommended the celebration roast because it has “10 times as much flavor, and it's not rubbery.”

Having grown up in Minnesota in

a “meat and potatoes” family, Holtgrewe said most of the meals she makes are vegan adaptations of her mom's recipes. With the show, Holtgrewe hopes to alleviate some of the difficulties vegans can face, starting with their tendency to be on the defensive in response to assumptions people make about them.

“I’m trying to break the myth that we sit around and eat twigs and berries and sing *Kumbaya*,” she said. “There’s a misconception about what vegans are — what they eat, what they don't eat.”

The more you cook, Holtgrewe said, the more you understand the ingredients, and eventually you can just make stuff up. Most of her own recipes are put together on the spot.

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Two chilis from Rhymes with Vegan

Vegan white 'chicken' chili

12 oz. chicken-style smart strips, seitan or extra-firm tofu, cut into half-inch pieces

4 - 15 1/2 oz. cans great northern beans, drained

2 - 10 oz. cans green enchilada sauce, medium spice level

1 quart no-chicken broth

2 large Anaheim chilis, seeded and chopped

2 large cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 yellow onion, chopped

1 onion bouillon cube, crumbled

2 Tbsp. cumin

1 tsp. cayenne

Pepper to taste

2 Tbsp. olive oil

Saute onion and garlic in hot oil. Add chilis; the smart strips, seitan or tofu; and pepper and saute. Add broth, beans, and enchilada sauce, and cover to boil.

Lower heat, cover, and simmer for about one half hour. Add spices and bouillon, cover, and simmer some more. The longer

this dish cooks, the better the flavors meld.

To serve, garnish with vegan sour cream, cilantro, and avocado slice. Homemade tortilla chips add just the crunch needed on the side.

Mom's red chili

3 Tbsp. olive oil

3 cloves garlic, chopped

1/2 vidalia onion, chopped

1 each, red, yellow, and green pepper, chopped

1 packet chili seasoning

1/2 cup chili powder

2 cans dark kidney beans

1 can light kidney beans

3 cans hot chili beans

1 tsp. cayenne pepper

4 or 5 cups crimini mushrooms, chopped

3 cans stewed tomatoes

1 bag textured vegetable protein (TVP)

Pour the olive oil in a good size stockpot. Add onions and cook on low until onions sweat, or turn

clear. Add garlic and mushrooms and saute.

Add all other ingredients except TVP. Simmer one hour. Ten minutes before chili is ready add TVP. Cooking TVP too long will cause it to toughen. When serving chili add a dollop of vegan sour cream and some green onion. Corn chip scoops are great to use as a spoon for this dish.

Chilis are better the next day as the flavors have time to really blend. Any leftovers are great over a veggie hotdog on a bun with chopped onions and pickle relish. Or freeze leftovers to take for lunches or a quick dinner next month. (Serves 8-10) ■

Overheard...

...in Seward:

"She asked me, 'What were you before you were gay?'" and I said, 'A zygote.'"

— Woman at the Seward Co-op

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"I don't follow recipes," she said. "I find when I do, the food tastes terrible."

Next stop, television?

The ultimate goal for *Rhymes With Vegan* is to get it on television, Holtgrewe said, adding that she hopes to get more sponsors in the meantime.

Although the ARC has promoted veganism in the past by hosting cooking classes and handing out literature, Cozzetto said they were excited about the show because of its ability to get the message out to so many people via the internet.

"I've been looking at the traffic," Cozzetto said. "She's getting a lot of hits."

With the environmental and health movements jumping on the vegan wagon, Cozzetto said she thinks more people will be experimenting with vegan recipes — even if they still eat meat.


"I've eaten a lot of Meagan's cooking and let me tell you, it's really tasty stuff," she said. Holtgrewe made a vegan artichoke dip for a recent ARC open house that was "just as good as the dip at the Loring Bar people used to rave about." ■

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