

Party People '08

Eating With the Candidates

In between bites of an ice cream cone, Barack Obama tries to balance a dripping mound of vanilla with his evident concern for a voter telling him about the son she lost to the war in Iraq. John McCain, as has been widely reported, is not a particularly big fan of vegetables. And, in other food-related news, when asked why the doughnuts that fuel him on the campaign trail had gotten smaller, McCain quipped, "it's another sign campaign money is down."

Touring the country, city to city, speech to speech, presidential candidates suffer from a taxing eating schedule. This election, many of the candidates boasted ultra-healthy eating habits. On a typical day, Mitt Romney didn't eat much more than granola, a chicken sandwich, and a fish dinner—topped off by a daily run. Mike Huckabee—who dropped 110 pounds during his time as Governor of Arkansas—made a diet of protein bars, salads, and steamed vegetables—minus the carrots. It's no wonder that most politicians impose some kind of stricture on the eating they do have control over. In the midst of celebratory fish fries, clam bakes, fundraisers, and sampling the local pizza, eating has always played a powerful role in winning the hearts and minds of voters.

Hillary Clinton, who apparently loves Dove bars, tends to favor flavorful, healthier Middle Eastern fare, including hummus and baba ghanouj. Still, she's indulged in her fair share of ice cream cones during the never-ending primary season. Obama, also a health nut who thrives off his daily workout, dives into a Philly cheese steak and absorbs a taco all to the tune of camera clicks.

To the relief of most candidates, few culinary events bring them face-to-face with their most-hated foods. Obama has never held a rally at a beet festival, Clinton hasn't been forced to consume anything still breathing (her only rule), and Romney successfully avoided eggplant.

—Jeffrey Steen



Restaurants Green Up for the DNC

The fight for the Democratic presidential nomination may have turned toxic, but the convention will be clean and green. They've set a goal to be the "most environmentally sustainable political convention in modern American history." Not to be outdone, local restaurants are changing how they manage waste, reducing water use, limiting transportation exhaust, and offsetting electricity consumption. It's not uncommon to find restaurants like Beau Jo's pizza serving up to-go foods in biodegradable containers. The waitstaff at Aix (17th Avenue in Denver) sports "green sleeves"—shirts made from organic, recycled fibers. If Barack or Hillary make it out to the Pearl Street Mall, they'll find The Kitchen, where rather than throwing away uncooked food and open wine bottles at the end of the night, the staff eats and drinks their leftovers at communal dinners.

"Customers want to know where their food comes from and that it's produced in a humane and sustainable way," says Ted Rose, Vice President of Development for Boulder-based Renewable Choice Energy. "Energy is a piece of that puzzle." Renewable Choice provides renewable energy credits and carbon offsets to individuals and businesses that transition to wind power.

Big Red F Restaurant Group, which includes Jax Fish House, Lola, Centro, The West End Tavern, and Zolo Grill, recently made the switch. According to John Bachman, Big Red F's director of operations, "We were able to increase the amount of energy offset from roughly 30 percent of our usage to 100 percent without much of an increase in cost."

Convention or no convention, Denver restaurants have realized that going green by switching to renewable energy is worthwhile because it's in line with the increasingly eco-savvy values of their clientele. "It's a natural piece of this exciting trend," Rose adds.

—Gigi Ragland

