



Oakland restaurant serving meals with a side of conflict

Conflict Kitchen only serves food from countries U.S. has conflicts with

PITTSBURGH -

People walking through Schenley Plaza in Oakland might see a sign written in Farsi and wonder what it means. It's loosely translated to mean [Conflict Kitchen](#), and right now, it's serving food from Iran.

The take-out restaurant only serves food from countries the U.S. is in conflict with, to get people's attention by attacking their senses.

"That's our first introduction. We want it to be seductive, the food needs to be great," said co-director Jon Rubin. "One of the unique things is that we're the only Persian restaurant in Pittsburgh. We were the only Afghan restaurant the city's ever had, the only Venezuelan."

Every few months, the restaurant goes through a total transformation to serve a new country's cuisine.

"I think if we were just handing out pamphlets on the street, everybody would just walk by, but if they're getting food with the pamphlet, they'll sit down and read it," said chef Robert Sayre.

In fact, the creators of Conflict Kitchen inform others with every meal they serve up.

"When you buy the food here, you get a wrapper around the food that has interviews that we've done with 50 Iranians in Iran, as well as in the U.S.," said Rubin. "They present viewpoints on women's rights, on their thoughts on Israel, their thoughts on the United States, their thoughts on their own government and sometimes these thoughts are contradictory. And that, to us, is interesting."

Most of what Americans know about Iran is based on the country's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"Most of Iran was born after the revolution, so this is the only Iran they've known, and some of them support the government, some don't," said Sayre.

"Folks in Iran, much like people in the U.S., have a very complex way of seeing their own lives," said Rubin. "I mean, 70 percent of Iran is under the age of 30. It's a very educated, cosmopolitan and progressive place."

And just like the people, the food is also complex.

"Whereas cucumber is considered a cold ingredient because it makes your mouth water and makes you salivate, and the way you digest them differently, and so the idea in Persian cooking is to balance the two always," said Sayre.

Monroeville resident Louie Al-Hashimi is Syrian American, but the food he grew up eating isn't much different than the Iranian meals served at Conflict Kitchen.

"Maybe once someone tries the food of that country, it might ignite a curiosity, and that will lead to further discussion, so I think it's definitely a good start," said Al-Hashimi. "The Syrian people, we're very friendly people, like most Arabs, and like any other culture and any other kind of people that you'll find around the world. We also have good food."

Conflict Kitchen will continue to serve Iranian food through early July, when the menu switches over to Cuban.

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