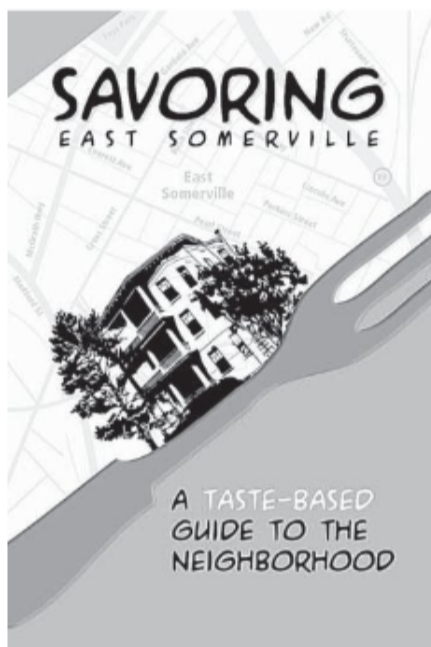


Local organization brings the flavors of East Somerville to life through recipes, narratives

BY ALEXA SASANOW
Daily Staff Writer

It's often said that the best way to get to know a neighborhood is through the eyes of its locals. This is the mentality that drove the publishing of the new "taste-based guide" to East Somerville, compiled from the histories and cuisines of its residents and business owners.



COURTESY EAST SOMERVILLE COOKBOOK

The diverse residents, cultures and foods of East Somerville enhance the pages of a new community cookbook.

"Savoring East Somerville" is the latest project of the community-based organization East Somerville Main Streets (ESMS). The cookbook is a collection of recipes and stories from businesses all over East Somerville; while the first half highlights the neighborhood's businesses, the second half is handed over to East Somerville residents, highlighting the vibrant stories of those who have been in the area for generations and those who just moved in.

The aim of the project was not only to introduce the greater Somerville area to the neighborhood, but also to introduce the neighborhood to all of its residents, said Tufts senior Becca Novak, who interns at ESMS and coordinated the production of the book.

"It's a working-class neighborhood and doesn't necessarily have a central place like Davis Square where a lot of social things can happen — [it has] just a main street," she said. "I think the main [point] is that it's a neighborhood full of people from a lot of different backgrounds and different kinds of businesses, and they don't really know each other — some are English-speaking or Spanish-speaking and some are Portuguese-speaking — and [the goal is] to introduce them to each other."

For an area that holds the distinction of being the "oldest and [most] ethnically diverse neighborhood in Somerville," according to ESMS' Web site, the cookbook offers its readers snippets of many different cultures, from the horchatas and stews of the

large Salvadorian immigrant population to the favored cocktails of its Albanian liquor store owner.

The book also offered opportunities for locals, as much of it was compiled by volunteer residents. When Novak began interviewing business owners, one of her goals was to get community members involved, and many who saw advertisements for the project in the newspapers and around town became a part of the process.

"It's a very community-based project," Novak said. "I could go in and say, 'I want to make a cookbook,' but this was a way that really built up the community."

Mark Teiwes, a professional photographer and East Somerville resident, volunteered to take the photos of the business owners that accompany their stories.

"I used to live in Gloucester, and I did portraits of people working in the fishing industry up there," he said. "I moved to East Somerville about a year ago, and I wanted to do business portraits and I needed a local partner. I went and stopped by the office of ESMS and I told them my idea, and they said, 'By the way, we're doing this cookbook project, with pictures of the businesses and the people who work there,' so it just worked out. For me, it was just a great way to get to know my community and to be involved in it, as well as practice my art."

Teiwes' photos are highlighted by the book's layout, done by graphic

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New cookbook delivers recipes and local customs

COOKBOOK

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designer Laura Vivencio, who has been volunteering for various ESMS initiatives for about a year. He described getting involved as "an organic process," as well as a "really fun project."

While most of Vivencio's previous work with ESMS had been on the promotions committee, the book offered new situations to introduce the greater community to the worlds inside East Somerville.

"I was selling the cookbooks at the Union Square winter market this weekend, and people would come up and be like, 'East Somerville, where's that?' and flip through the books, and say, 'There are all those restaurants just on that strip of Broadway?'" she said.

"It was really profound and pleasantly surprising to people that there's so much to see and do in East Somerville, and hopefully this cookbook will introduce people to that, and they'll spend more time there and do more business there."

East Somerville has much to offer to the greater Somerville area, including Tufts. Vivencio highlighted the plentiful "cheap eats" as incentives for college students to check out the area, and Novak noted the neighborhood's international film nights and events like Honk! Fest that make it a welcome change of pace from campus life.

While those outside East Somerville might find a new weekend hangout within the

pages of the guide, residents will get to see their own faces and stories, as well as those of their neighbors.

"People will tend to go to the same restaurants they already know," Novak said. "When they see this and they see the picture of the business owner and a background story, then maybe that'll start a conversation."

Vivencio noted that in the residents' portion of the book, the street they live on is included with their story.

"I'm hoping that people will see the street names and maybe go knock on their door and say, 'Oh, I made [your recipe] last night,'" she said.

Mostly, the guide aims to open doors and conversations between old-timers and newcomers, residents, business owners and tourists alike, highlighting the diversity of the neighborhood.

"People at the crafts fair were like, 'Oh my God, there's Ethiopian food, I had no idea; look at this group of people sitting at this funky table,'" Vivencio said. "I think it's really going to initiate people to check things out and try something new."

Additional information about "Savoring East Somerville" is available at eastsomervillemainstreets.org, where the book is available for purchase. It's also available at select businesses in Somerville and at various holiday crafts fairs in the Boston area, or by e-mailing Becca Novak at Rebecca.Novak@tufts.edu.