

Chef partners with Laguna Beach-based orchard owner to rescue crop of canceled apple-picking season

By **Daniel Langhorne** - September 21, 2020

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Lindsay Smith-Rosales, executive chef of Nirvana Grille, and Laguna Beach resident Arnold Starr at Starr Apple Orchard in Julian. Courtesy of Lindsay Smith-Rosales

Nirvana Grille Executive Chef Lindsay Smith-Rosales was delivering a meal to the Laguna Beach home of a longtime customer when she learned his apple and pear harvest would soon wither on trees at his ranch in Julian.

Like other California apple orchards, Apple Starr Orchard was forced to close its public self-pick operation because of the pandemic. This left Dr. Arnold Starr with a whole season's worth of fruit and nowhere to send it.

"I said, 'that's no good we've got to create a solution here,'" Smith-Rosales said.

Smith-Rosales saw a business opportunity to support her restaurant, get organic produce into the hands of Laguna Beach residents, and help out a loyal customer. Nirvana Grille is selling the apples and pears picked at Apple Starr Orchard from its [online grocery co-op](#) by the half-peck (5 to 7 pounds) for \$20 and full-peck (10 to 12 pounds) for \$36.

In the [early days of the stay-at-home order](#), Smith-Rosales created an online co-op to offer customers a no-stress shopping option to avoid long lines and empty shelves at local grocery stores.

This new revenue stream helped sustain Nirvana Grille during the state's ban on in-house dining. Nearly six months later, Smith-Rosales saw a chance to help a loyal customer and grabbed it.

"If we can't find ways to support each other when we have the opportunity, who is going to be there for us?" Smith-Rosales said.

Some fruit that turns ripe before being sold is being used in meals served by Nirvana Grille. The remainder will be donated to Laguna Food Pantry, Sally's Fund, and Alzheimer's Orange County.



Pears hang from a tree at Starr Apple Orchard. Courtesy of Lindsay Smith-Rosales

Farming is a second career of sorts for the 88-year-old Starr.

Starr was the second neurologist to join UC Irvine faculty and became the first chair of its Neurology Department. He led the division of neurology, as it became a new department in 1977. He remained as its chair for 10 years.

Starr acquired the organic Julian farm in the late 1980s. The 28-acre property is home to about 1,000 pear and fruit trees. Under a previous owner, part of the ranch was earlier used as a milk dairy.

Now retired from UC Irvine, Starr has hired a temporary staff to pick and transport the apples and pears to Nirvana Grille.

"Dr. Starr has known Chef Lindsay for years," Starr's assistant Sandie Steele wrote in an email. "He finds her to be equally dedicated to the health and well being of our community. He appreciates her recognition and desire to distribute his organic fruit during this pandemic. He has always been thoughtful and kind, he is extremely grateful to her. She has integrity and a huge heart."

Different pear varieties including red and green Bartlett, Bosc, Anjou, and Comice and Granny and Jonagold apples will be available in blocks through Nov. 7. The public is encouraged to pre-order their pears and apples ahead of time.

Visit nirvanagrille.com to buy produce from Apple Starr Orchard. Orders can be picked up Tuesday and Thursday thru Sunday from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.



A freshly picked apple at Starr Apple Orchard. Courtesy of Lindsay Smith-Rosales

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