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Flying With Faber - November 2011

Stuart J. Faber

A Trip to the Nation's Salad Bowl

BY Stuart J. Faber



Stuart Faber helping to harvest the broccoli crop. It might seem to those who have read the last few columns of *Flying With Faber* that I am having an identity crisis. In a number of columns, I described trips which were conducted from my airplane. The next column may have included a description of my sailing on a boat – “Sailing With Faber.” Finally, I recounted the story of, “Horse-And-Buggy With Faber;” my epoch of operating a horse and buggy along the trails of Mackinac Island, Mich.

I can't make up my mind about how to banner this article. So let's call this, “Gleaning with Faber.” During my recent trip to Monterey and the Salinas Valley in California, I met with a group called “Ag Against Hunger,” a non-profit organization which recognized that even though we live in an area where there is an abundance of food, millions of Americans, and of course folks all over the world, suffer from hunger. From time to time all of us have exclaimed, “I'm famished!” For us, the phrase is really hyperbole. I doubt that any of us has ever really suffered from famine – the word from which famished is derived. When we claim to be “starving,” we are not accurately describing our current level of nutritional sustenance. The truth is that when we use any of these phrases, it means that we haven't stuffed ourselves for a few hours – and the clock tells us that it's time to eat again.

When you and I do feel pangs of hunger, we can generally do something about it within moments. We can always get our hands within reach of something – Tater Tots, Big Macs, Doritos or a Hostess Cupcake. These items may not be the healthiest things for us to consume, but at least they will make our “famine” subside.

But what about folks who don't have the luxury of food at their fingertips? In some parts of the world, poor soil and no rain means no crops. Since there is no water in some of these parts of the world, fish tend to select other habitats. What little food is available is insufficient to feed the overpopulated communities.

In other parts of the world, such as the United States, there is an abundance of food. Nevertheless, some folks don't have the money to purchase it. Whatever a person's political beliefs, I doubt that anyone would view a starving child as a good thing. But no matter who is at fault for a child's hunger, no one can support the notion that innocent babies and small children should go without food.

This column is designed to tell folks how and where to enjoy themselves – so I don't intend this edition to be a sermon. But can anyone disagree with the notion that hunger in our country is not only a bad thing for the hungry folks, but also deteriorates the fabric of our entire nation as well? If we want to be purely selfish about it, hungry people, in an effort to assuage their pain, often resort to desperate behavior. Those of us, both the sympathetic and unsympathetic, can end up as victims of this desperation. I've visited countries, such as Brazil, where the well-to-do are forced to build ten-foot high electric fences around their homes. Their kids cannot run across the street or next door to play with Johnnie or Susie. I don't want to build an electric fence around my house. I don't think any of our readers do either. We would rather contribute food than have it stolen from our homes.

Ag Against Hunger has developed partnerships with growers, shippers, processors, food banks and other agencies. The result is that over 158,500 hungry people in Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties of California are recipients of fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables. It's alarming that, within these three counties, 25 percent of the population is served by food banks – 15 percent of the people are homeless. Hunger impacts the most helpless of the population. At least 45 percent of the people served by these food banks in Central California are children. I was astounded when I learned of these statistics.

In 2010, Ag Against Hunger collected healthy and delicious produce from the Salinas Valley and distributed more than 12 million pounds throughout California and neighboring states. Where does this food come from? For a

number of reasons, there is a surplus of fruits and vegetables produced on some of our farms. Every month, a group of more than 50 growers contacts Ag Against Hunger to pick up the surplus stuff. The result is a collection of tomatoes, potatoes, stone fruit, apples, lettuce, broccoli, spinach and strawberries, all of which is shared with food banks throughout the state. When the growing season is over, Ag Against Hunger folks hop in a truck and pick up fresh produce in neighboring states.

How is this produce harvested? By people like you and me. Along with a group of volunteers, I showed up at a farm in the early hours of the morning. We were handed knives and gloves, given a crash course on how to harvest, and off we trotted into the broccoli fields. Within about an hour, I had picked around 30 pounds of broccoli. Not only is this a worthy cause, it's an effective way to teach children about where food comes from and how to appreciate what we eat. It was exciting to see parents bonding with their children and with other families. Kids as young as three years old were working in the fields and having a great time. It also made me and others appreciate how back-breaking this work really is. By noon, I was hot and exhausted. Imagine having to do this work 12 hours a day for months at a time.

The experience also raised questions about our attitude toward guest workers from other countries. None of us wants to pay \$10 a pound for apples or lettuce. And few Americans want to pick these items for minimum wage – or any wage for that matter. So what is the solution?

Most of the time, we fly our airplanes to have fun. We use our planes to reach exotic places, to discover fertile fishing holes, find a great restaurant or attend a sports event. I admire those who use their aircraft to help other people, such as Doctors or Dentists Without Boundaries, missionaries – or gleaners.

For those who don't know where the term came from (including me), I suggest a look at Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. Gleaning was described as the gathering of crops, which remain after the general harvest. The bounty was given to the poor. I am not a student of the Bible. But I can't argue with the idea that modern-day gleaning is a great idea. For more on the subject, contact www.againsthunger.org.

Rancho Cielo Youth Campus

Several years ago, a California Central Coast superior court judge, John Phillips, became frustrated with sentencing juvenile offenders to jail. He realized that a vast majority of these kids reoffended shortly after they were released.

He had a vision, which has now transformed into Rancho Cielo Youth Campus. The judge was convinced that, if we could take youthful offenders and teach them a trade and provide them with the feelings of self esteem that grow out of developing vocational skills, these kids could stay out of trouble. He was right. According to his figures, more than 82 percent of Rancho Cielo graduates have remained trouble-free.

The judge organized a group of local business folks and landowners. Together, they acquired a 100-acre parcel of land in the Salinas foothills. Classrooms, a commercial kitchen, an amphitheater and other buildings were constructed. Many of these structures were built by the kids as they learned the construction trade. The curriculum grew to a number of trades. One class consists of a wildfire suppression program. Another is the construction program where kids learn framing, masonry, painting, fencing, graffiti removal, custom woodworking, painting and landscaping.

The Rancho Cielo Drummond Culinary Academy is dedicated to providing youth with an opportunity to gain skills which can translate into making them employable in the culinary and hospitality industry. Kids learn basic culinary and computer skills. Not only do they spend hours in the kitchen, they also attend a program which earns them a high school degree. Another program consists of furniture making and woodworking. I saw stunning examples of hand-crafted furniture from Adirondack chairs to garden trellises and benches.

HyThe Silver Star Youth Program accepts students between ages 15 and 18 who are screened for vocational and school programs. Kids must show a desire to learn a trade and seek employment. The program includes Monterey County's Community Schools program. Kids who were destined for a life of adult crime have been turned around.

I had the pleasure (and the honor), of being invited to tour the ranch. Later, we gathered for a gourmet dinner prepared by the kids. We had fresh salmon, just-harvested vegetables and dessert – all made from scratch. The dinner rivaled in quality and service many I've had in upscale restaurants.

At the ranch, I had a tremendous amount of fun, learned a great deal and left feeling invigorated. Travelers can ski, swim, golf or frolic anytime, but this was a unique and life-altering experience. For more information, contact Rancho Cielo at www.ranchocieloyc.org.

Hyatt Regency Monterey Resort & Spa on Del Monte Golf Course



Gazebo at night on the grounds of the beautiful Hyatt Monterey. (Hyatt Monterey) 1 Old Golf Course Road, Monterey CA 93940-4908 831/372-1234

Back to work, it was time to visit and evaluate a few hotels and restaurants. Situated on 22 lush green acres and just minutes from the Monterey Peninsula Airport, downtown and the waterfront attractions, this comfortable, pet friendly resort offers the best of both worlds – seclusion and accessibility. Newly renovated guestrooms, a spa and workout center, three great restaurants, and meeting space for any function from a family reunion, a pilot's club meeting or a high powered mega-conference, this resort has enough to keep you occupied for a long weekend.

The newly renovated guestrooms and suites are cheerful, comfortable and just-right luxurious. Take your pick of golf course or pool views. The furnishings are fashioned from natural materials such as leather and walnut, all in soothing earth tone colors. After an exhaustive midnight walk adjacent to (and on), the golf course, with my two doggies, the signature Grand Bed, fitted with sumptuous white linens, fluffy pillows and duvet over a pillow-top mattress, provided me with a great night's sleep. At daybreak, I awoke, strolled over to the spacious bathroom, jumped into the huge open shower and luxuriated for what seemed forever under the generous spray of the Grohe hand-held rain shower head. This home-away-from-home also sported a multi-functional work area with Wi-Fi technology, comfortable robes, 32" LCD flat panel TV with On-Command Video system, iHome Stereo with iPod dock, full-length mirror, and complimentary Starbuck's Coffee.

For a light snack and relaxation, Knuckles Sports Bar is one of the most popular spots in town. Hang out and gaze at historical sports memorabilia while you enjoy samples of 20 beers, sandwiches, juicy burgers and other tasty mini-feasts. Sports lovers have a choice of about 20 large screen TVs with just about every game that happens to be on TV that day.

Ranked by *Golf Digest* as one of the top five in America, the course at the resort is a favorite of both professional and amateur players of all skill levels. The well-protected greens and narrow, tree lined fairways have been home to many professional events. In addition, you can spend a day at the Pebble Beach Golf Academy and pick up some pointers from seasoned professional instructors. You have a choice of private or group sessions.

Non-golfers can take an invigorating hike or bike ride, work out in the new health club, lounge around one or both of the heated pools, dip in the hot tub or, get pampered at the new full-service spa. Bring the kids and drop them off at Camp Hyatt.

Portola Hotel & Spa



Located near the wharf is the Portola Hotel and Spa. (Portola Hotel

2 Portola Plaza, Monterey, CA 93940, 888/222-5851, info@portolahotel.com.

If you want to be in the heart of the city of Monterey and close to the wharf and waterfront action, I highly recommend the Portola Hotel & Spa at Monterey Bay. Located in historic downtown Monterey and overlooking the bay and beautiful peninsula shoreline, The Portola is a bright, airy and relaxing waterfront retreat surrounded by unique shopping, fine dining, spectacular coastal trails and beaches, and the rich historical setting of Old Monterey. Within 10 minutes of the Monterey Peninsula Airport, we arrived, parked the car and never again got behind the wheel until our reluctant departure three days later. The newly renovated rooms are cheerfully furnished. Most have spectacular views of Monterey Bay. You are just steps away from Monterey's scenic bike path, Del Monte Beach, Fisherman's Wharf, Cannery Row and Monterey Bay Aquarium.



The newly remodeled guest rooms are spacious and beautiful. (Portola Hotel) The elegant, yet comfortable guestrooms and suites range in size from 400 to 1,000 square feet. Each features wood furnishings, large bathrooms with separate vanity areas, white shuttered windows and high speed internet. Many rooms have private balconies. Other amenities include 42" flat-screen TVs, custom designed mattresses and organic toiletries.

Guests can enjoy a variety of world-class spa treatments including 50-minute symphony massages, designer facials, manicures or pedicures. The spa and fitness center offers steam, sauna, outdoor pool and Jacuzzi and a full state-of-the-art workout center including free-weights, treadmills, elliptical and stationary cycles.



The Portola Hotel and Spa offer a full range of amenities including a fitness center, pool, Jacuzzi along with a variety of spa services. (Portola Hotel) With more than 50,000 square feet of flexible indoor space and near 60,000 square feet of outdoor event space, the Portola Hotel & Spa welcomes groups of all sizes. Planning a pilot's club or pilot's reunion event? You can select from 25 meeting rooms – even a 500-foot amphitheater. Plus, the hotel offers video conferencing, 24-hour business center and boarding pass printing.

Most important, this is the dog-friendliest hotel I have ever visited. Cheryl and I arrived with Aunt Bea and Clara Belle. They had the run of the place. The rooms were adorned with special doggie beds, custom food and water bowls and a host of tasty treats. Of course, human beds were also provided.

Not only is The Portola pet friendly, it is kid friendly as well. Portola Pirates is a complimentary program, which provides kids with a treasure chest upon check-in complete with pirate-inspired toys and a scavenger hunt map for hidden treasures.

Best Cuisine in Town

Few places in the United States offer so much in fresh culinary products as the Monterey-Salinas area. Most seafood, 100 percent sustainable, comes from the central coastal waters. Eggs, poultry and some beef are grown locally. Of course, the Salinas Valley is dubbed “The Salad Bowl of America.” I met two outstanding chefs, one at the Hyatt, the other at the Portola. Both Russell Young, Hyatt’s executive chef and Jason Giles, Portola’s executive chef, visit the farms and hand-select their produce. Each has a profound professional affection for seafood and each is a master in its preparation.



The Tuscan Kitchen at the Hyatt. (Hyatt Monterey)The cuisine at the Hyatt is remarkable. Russell oversees TusCA restaurant (named from Tuscany and California), and prepares incredible California and Italian cuisine in an open-air kitchen. From the caverns of the wood-burning oven emerged pizza, juicy steaks and slabs of fresh fish and chicken. For sides, the squash ravioli and the wild mushroom risotto were delicious. The Wine Cellar is stocked with a comprehensive array of California and Italian varietals. The Beringer Knight’s Valley, Napa 2002 Cabernet was a perfect match with our two entrees, an oven roasted New York steak and a succulent braised lamb shank.



Jack's Restaurant at the Portola is outstanding. I can't decide between the two, which was my favorite. Jason began our meal with a fresh buratta cheese and heirloom tomatoes. Olive oil from nearby Chico was drizzled on the tomatoes. Next came a sweet corn soup with local corn, of course, The winery-inspired private dining room at Jack's Restaurant in the Portola Hotel. (Portola Hotel) with a pesto oil and red flame grapes. It was remarkable. Locally caught sea bass was the centerpiece of the main course. It was lightly crusted with basil and served with a cashew rice and broccolini. We completed the feast with a spiced funnel cake and vanilla bourbon peaches.

Jack's Restaurant also serves USDA prime beef and veal as well as a sumptuous osso bucco, braised short ribs and a variety of pasta dishes.

The Airports

Monterey Peninsula Airport (MRY) is approximately three miles from the center of the city. This gorgeous airport has parallel runways, 28L/10R and 28R/10L. The primary runway is 7,616 feet long. The second is 3,513 feet long. The ILS approach is to 10R. However, the wind direction is frequently not suitable for Runway 10 operations, so Runway 28 is often your option. Runway 28L has a localizer approach and a GPS approach. Three choices of FBOs are at your disposal: Monterey Bay Aviation, 831/375-2359, Del Monte Aviation, 831/373-4151 or Monterey Jet Center, 831/373-0100.

I also enjoy flying in to Salinas Municipal Airport (KSNS). At an elevation of 84 feet above sea level, the field has three runways. Runway 8/26 is 6,003 feet in length, Runway 13/31 is 4,825 feet long and Runway 14/32 is 1,900 feet long. The field has numerous approaches. Take your pick from an ILS, VOR or GPS approaches to several runways. My recommendation for an FBO is Central Coast Aviation, 800/421-7488.

Next year, I plan to return to the Salinas Valley. I will participate in the gleaning program. I will also re-visit Rancho Cielo Youth Campus. I am sure that they can both use my help – and I can certainly benefit from helping them.