

Sushi-A-Go-Go

Sushi-A-Go-Go Owner Was Gold Miner, Cowboy, Photographer Before Chef



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Have you ever eaten a cowboy roll or a southwest hippie roll? These might seem like strange names for different kinds of sushi, but they reflect the colorful past of Sushi-A-Go-Go owner Troy Withington. “At my shop, there are a lot of things that reflect my past, such as the names for the sushi that I make,” Withington said.

It was a long road for Withington before he discovered his calling and opened a sushi restaurant in the Third Ward’s Milwaukee Public Market. Before his passion for raw fish, Withington was a nomad. He went from flying in the air force, to working in gold mines in California and the Yukon, to branding cows in Nevada and Utah, and to finally coming back to his hometown of Milwaukee as an advertising photographer.

Withington was one of the first Milwaukeeans to live in the now trendy Third Ward. He owned a photography studio there in the 1980s, just as the area was starting to flourish as a haven for artists. Over a decade later, on Memorial Day in 1999, Withington entered the world of sushi because of a little rain.

Withington was hosting a studio barbeque party for his photography clients when it began to rain. Since he wasn’t able to barbeque, he moved the party inside, and created a makeshift sushi bar. “The sushi went over so well with my clients, that I just decided at that very moment to start making sushi for a living,” Withington said. And that he did. Within a month, he had a licensed catering kitchen.

Withington began by giving out free sushi at *Jazz in the Park*, a weekly Milwaukee Festival. After five weeks, *Jazz in the Park* offered him the chance to be a permanent food vendor, and he began to turn a profit. After gaining more experience through vending, Withington decided to take a six-month course at the California Sushi Academy in Venice, California.

After school he returned to Milwaukee and began vending again. A friend told Withington about the opening of the Milwaukee Public Market, and he decided to take advantage of an opportunity to have his own sushi business. Withington pitched his idea to the Market, and soon he was the head of his own sushi shop. “We brought the concept to them and they bought it and loved it,” Withington said.

Withington has thrived at the Market, and enjoys its personal atmosphere. “It’s like a little village and everyone has their own distinct stories. You get to know about your customers. I have students who eat with us, and they come back to update us about school and their life.”

In the short time that Withington has been at the market, he already has many stories.

“We had a couple from Hawaii come to the Market, and the husband got so excited that we had a Hawaiian plate lunch. He called his friends in Hawaii and told them all about this local treasure that he found in the small city of Milwaukee.”

Withington enjoys the atmosphere of the Market and the relationships he builds with customers, but his passion is largely rooted in the cuisine he serves. So what if you are a little intimidated to eat a cowboy roll? “Aside from sushi, we have about 50 items rotating on special now, from Hawaiian cuisine to Chinese food. I really enjoy coming up with new menus that fit our style of Asian American comfort food,” Withington said.