

## FOOD

# Culinary tours looking to expand in Sarasota

**Tour provides glimpse into the past — between mouthfuls**

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Published: Saturday, July 30, 2016 at 5:23 p.m.

SARASOTA — Just halfway through their culinary tour, Ruth Novak and Sandy Jannetta had food babies.

The two were among five who went on a Key Culinary Tour on Saturday. Susan Robinson, founder and CEO, started the tours in January after going on a culinary tour in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami in April 2015.

Having worked as a concierge for 14 years, she said she thought a culinary tour would do well in St. Armand's Circle. During the three-hour tours, guides talk about the history of the circle and the food.

"I knew that Sarasota would love this kind of concept, and I knew that St. Armand's was perfectly laid out for this," Robinson said.

Chef Robert Gaglio took the group of five to four restaurants and two specialty stores on St. Armand's. The tour met at the bronze, life-sized John Ringling statue that stands six feet tall.

He started off talking about Ringling, who in the early 20th century was one of the wealthiest men in America. One of the seven Ringling brothers, he managed some of the largest circuses in the country. Ringling and his brother Charles first bought the 20 acres that would become St. Armand's. Over time, they bought more.

"He wanted to make it the West Palm Beach of the west coast," Gaglio said.

In one day in 1926, real-estate sales topped \$1 million, when sales of the John Ringling Estates started, he said. As the group made its way counter-clockwise through the circle, Gaglio explained that the gold quadrant of the circle was one of the first to be built. Ringling's real estate office used to be in that area of the circle.

But following the stock market crash, Ringling died with just \$311 in the bank.

"There's a theme in Florida where very wealthy people come here and lose everything," Gaglio said.

After talking, the group ate Cuban sandwiches and 1905 salad at Columbia Restaurant. The original Ybor City location is the oldest restaurant in Florida, one of the restaurants' servers told them.

It started as a small cafeteria for immigrant workers who made cigars, said Jacinto Miguel, who's been working there for 21 years. Over time, the cafeteria grew into a restaurant.

Gaglio said the Cuban sandwich was made to cater to the German, Cuban, Spanish and Italian immigrants who worked in the cigar factories. The sandwich has European Swiss cheese, Italian salami and Spanish glazed ham served on Cuban bread.

Kathleen Konicek-Moran, 65, said she lived in Miami for three years, and the sandwich rivaled one she had on South Beach.

After, Gaglio took the five to the spice shop Pepper Place. Jannetta asked to try a sauce with the Trinidad Scorpion pepper, one of the spiciest there is.

"I'm going for the kill, just to say that I tried it," she said. After sampling, she bought a bottle.

They also tried samples at Shore restaurant, Tommy Bahama and Blu Kouzina.

In late October, they'll be expanding the tours to include one for the art galleries on Palm Avenue, the downtown farmer's market and the Southside Village restaurants. The Village tour will highlight international foods such as Indian, French, Cuban and Asia-Pacific.

While the farmer's market tour is still being organized, she said she wants people to be able to shop at the weekend market before making their own lunch. A chef would help pick out produce before preparing lunch with them.

"We just want people to experience the greater city of Sarasota," she said. "I feel like this is something that has taken hold quickly."

For more information on the Key Culinary Tours, go to [keyculinarytours.com](http://keyculinarytours.com).



Sandy Jannetta serves herself some of Shore Diner's truffle fries during the Key Culinary Tour Saturday, July 30 on St. Armand's. STAFF PHOTO / RACHEL S. O'HARA