

ALLERGY SEASON AT FRESNO CITY COLLEGE

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Each spring, a wave of pollen sweeps through California's Central Valley, triggering allergy symptoms for thousands of residents. Winds carry these allergens across the region, infiltrating homes and settling in dust and fabrics, making relief feel nearly impossible, according to Baz Allergy, Asthma, & Sinus Center.

Fresno City College student, Azaria Ford, said on campus there are a lot of trees and flowers blooming, and most of these trees and plants spray pollen on the ground that affects her while going from class to class.

"As a college student, spring is a good and dreadful thing because you are looking forward to spring break, but you also know you're going to have to deal with allergies. Seasonal allergies affect me because the Central Valley is a pollen bowl, and it's hard for me to breathe," Ford said.

Ford said allergy season never makes her miss class or fall behind, but it does make attending harder. She said she will be uncomfortable in class, and it can be hard to look up at a screen or pay attention to lectures when her eyes hurt or when she has to clear her throat.

Justin Ramirez, the lead groundskeeper at FCC, said pollen is especially heavy during the spring. Luckily, he said he has been taking his allergy medication.

Ramirez said the trees that commonly produce the most pollen are the oak trees that surround campus. He said they are near the parking lots, around the center of the campus, heading towards the cafeteria and around the bookstore area.

"Around this time of year, especially, pine trees are producing new pine cones or needles, and stems that will have pollen pods or seed pods on them. We also have Elm trees that have already pretty much blossomed now and Chinese Pistachio trees that give a nice reddish and yellowish color in the Fall," Ramirez said.

However, Ramirez said it is the pine trees that produce the most pollen year-round. He said this is the yellowish substance that can be seen covering the cement around campus, and his crew of seven does their best to blow it all away as fast as they can.

"We're only seven guys, so we have to get through here quickly. I know we have been pushing to try and

get on a tree program where we can have people come in and prune them for us because a lot of these trees we can't reach, we don't have the capability to get up there," Ramirez said.

Ramirez said many of the trees on FCC's campus are historical, so removing them will not be easy. However, Ramirez also said that by living in the valley, he has noticed many people who weren't born with allergies may develop them anyway.

"All the smog, all the trees, people change, and they may have family members who are getting older and starting to develop seasonal allergies, so folks should get themselves allergy tested," Ramirez said.

Heather Collins, a registered nurse and the new Health Services coordinator at FCC, said right now the campus is seeing a lot of pollen, and throughout the seasons in the Central Valley, different factors occur.

"Throughout the year in the Central Valley, we see students with allergies. It can affect students, and they could get secondary infections from allergies if they aren't treated like sinus infections and ear infections," Collins said.

Collins said it is important that students practice good hygiene, such as washing their hands and faces and showering before bed, to combat allergens. She said rinsing these allergens off after doing day-to-day tasks like hiking, pruning, or fieldwork will help reduce exposure to airborne allergens in the short term.

"Handwashing is a really good idea all the time. Say you're sitting on the grass and pick up pollen, and you start touching your face, not only can you pick up germs that way, but you can also pick up pollen and other allergens," Collins said.

Raylani Boyb, an art major and English tutor at FCC said her eyes tear up at school due to allergies. She said it is especially bad on campus because of the trees and plants, and that when walking around, her eyes itch even if she takes medication beforehand.

"When I'm constantly sneezing in class, some people think I'm sick when that is not the case; my allergies are just really bad, and I tend to sneeze a lot," Boyb said.

Collins said students can find good charts online that

explain the difference between cold and allergy symptoms. She said allergies tend to be more itchy in the eyes, itchy throat or congestion.

"What your body is doing is making histamine, and that makes your nose and eyes water because your body is trying to rinse out that pollen, and sometimes it can be a little much," Collins said.

Boyb said the things that help her combat her allergies are herbal tea and Zertec. She said she takes one pill a day, or before she goes to bed, because the packaging says it lasts 24 hours, but Boyb said it doesn't seem like the pill lasts that long for her.

Collins said students should generally follow directions on medication packaging and ensure that, if they are taking allergy medication with chronic conditions, it is safe to use both medications simultaneously.

"Students can always speak with their doctor or pharmacist if they are not sure what to take. I recommend speaking to a pharmacist because they may be more accessible than scheduling a doctor's appointment sometimes," Collins said.

Collins said students may think allergy medication will make them sleepy, but there are newer medications that don't, like Claritin and Allegra. She said these can be better for students who need to stay alert and awake in class.

Boyb recommends using antihistamine eye drops and allergy medications such as Zyrtec, Xyzal or Claritin, depending on individual effectiveness. She also advises other students to use nasal spray correctly—spray it into your nose and let it sit without inhaling, as directed.

"If you have eye allergies, I'd definitely recommend Opcon eye drops or antihistamine eyedrops. Regular eye drops without an antihistamine don't really work for me, but I recommend just anything with a solution to combat your allergies," Boyb said.

Pine and oak trees at Fresno City College's campus near the Art/Home Economics building, April 10. Photo by Sara Cisneros



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IRENE'S: THE HEART OF TOWER DISTRICT

For over 30 years, Irene's Cafe has been in the heart of Fresno's Tower District. From a hearty and classic breakfast to casual dinner, Irene's has it all.

Family owned since 1991, Irene's draws you in with a painted mural and outdoor seating, perfect for a beautiful day and an interior that makes you feel right at home.

I had never tried Irene's and I don't live close to Tower District so it was never on my radar, but on Tuesday, March 31, I went down to talk to Maddie Guevara, a server at Irene's, and to try some food. When I walked in, I immediately got a familiar vibe from the place. It felt like somewhere I had been before despite never eating there.

It reminded me of The Fresno Breakfast House, a childhood restaurant of mine with its low and natural lighting, yellow walls and painted murals on the walls.

The seating is really retro. The seats are a red satin and cushioned with this fabric type of lining to them. It is like being at your grandma's house in the best way possible.

Guevara was instantly welcoming, having worked at Irene's for almost five years. The restaurant had incredible service and wonderful stories to share.

Guevara had a laidback but attentive attitude. She wore pins on her apron which were great conversation pieces and had tattoos and casual clothing, making her approachable. It added a sense of comfort and casualty to Irene's that you don't quite get at other restaurants.

"It's so rewarding. I've never had a job where I fit in quite like I do here. I've always been a little outcast and a little rebel. I've never felt more accepted than I do here which is something I am so grateful for because that's not always the case with work," Guevara said.

It wasn't just Guevara who was wonderful, but the food itself was too. Having taken her recommendation, The California Burger, I decided to give the food a try to see if the hype is deserved.

Spoiler: it definitely is.

The California Burger was a giant hamburger filled with avocado, bacon, jack and cheddar cheese plus all your average burger fillings like lettuce and pickles.



A photo inside Irene's restaurant taken on March 31. An interesting and retro layout of ceiling fans, repetitive lighting, interesting tile patterns and cushioned seating. Photo by Juan Muratalla.

What immediately caught my eye was the size of the burger. It was larger than an average burger with huge portions. It even came with a knife to hold it all together.

When I took a bite, I noticed how full the burger was. There was nothing of small size which is great for anyone who loves a lot of add-ons in their burger. It came as I expected, because you can't go wrong with a burger.

The Chicken Salad Sandwich was delicious. Initially there was some hesitation, the thought of a salad in a sandwich did not sound appetizing in my head.

But the chicken was well seasoned, vegetables tender and fresh and the mix of ranch and salad dressing struck a good balance. The size was filling, and the sandwich came with a good portion of french fries. The fries tasted homemade and sweet.

The food and quick service is why I can understand why people keep coming back and becoming the regulars that Guevara enjoys interacting with and serving.

"We see the same people all the time, our regulars keep us afloat. We're grateful for them and I've made so many precious friendships and relationships through my job," Guevara said.

The atmosphere of the restaurant is a vibe that not many restaurants in Fresno have anymore. Most are big businesses and run by corporations so they all look similar, but are still recognizable like McDonald's or Applebee's.

But there is only one Irene's and that makes it stand out within Tower District.

The decor is reminiscent of classic diners, yet it has its own flair. The music, colors and posters are all things you don't see and hear in restaurants anymore.

The music was actually played from the radio, something most restaurants avoid by creating playlists with no ads to keep the mood going, but that is the mood of Irene's. It's a place that hasn't changed and remains a testament to the restaurants that came before.

Overall, the vibe that Irene's gives off reminds those of the good old days and gives a taste to the new generations the beauty of simplicity in local restaurants that you don't see everyday. Overall, for my first time at Irene's, it was an incredible experience from the decor to energy to food.

Irene's has a charm that you can't really find in other restaurants in Fresno. The environment in Tower has grown with the town but Irene's has remained the same, serving the same food and seeing the same people

"We're so proud of our community and being right in the heart of Tower for the last 30 years has been such an honor and privilege for all of us. This community is so great and we take care of each other," Guevara said.



The California Burger at Irene's Cafe with a side of fries on March 31. The massive burger was a sight to behold as Guevara explained that regulars always come for the burgers and it is the most popular item on the menu. Photo by Katrina Saldivar.