

# Ring's Reflections

by Bob Ring

## An Original Gift for the Holidays

Are you looking for a fabulous restaurant experience in Tucson? Chances are that restaurant would be a member of Tucson Originals - an alliance of 52 (and growing) independently operated restaurants - that foster the rich culinary spirit of Tucson.

Pat and I found ourselves returning to the same restaurants, including Acacia, Chad's, Eclectic Café, J BAR, Jonathan's Cork, Pastiche, Risky Business, and the Tohono Chul Tea Room. When we found out they were all part of Tucson Originals, it was a "no-brainer" for us to "join up."

We feel lucky to live in a city with so many really good restaurants. And then to find that we had found a way to save money – while supporting local businesses – was a satisfying bonus. The savings come from generous discounts and a rewards program.

Tucson Originals was founded in 1998 over concern about the increasing competition of chain restaurants. Besides trying to improve their economic viability, the group quickly adopted a goal of community support – including donating time, facilities, food, and staff to help many local fundraising projects.

Tucson Originals became the prototype for other successful "originals" groups now operating in cities across the U.S.

Collectively, Tucson Originals can exploit the same kind of economic muscle that restaurant chains do by getting increased purchasing power from preferred suppliers. They can also support sustainable local agriculture to ensure the freshest ingredients.

The Tucson Originals alliance also enables the restaurants to share employee requirements and equipment needs and support each other in hard times. Their e-mail network facilitates communication of economic and community support information.

Among the most popular of the group's regular community activities are chef demonstrations and cooking classes.

Pat and I have gotten to know several of the Tucson Originals restaurant owners and chefs – who are always willing to stop by your table for a greeting.

The Tucson Originals participate in two signature events each year: Puttin' on the Dog and the Tucson Culinary Festival.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> the thirteenth annual Puttin' on the Dog event drew over 1100 people to watch Arizona celebrities model high fashion accompanied by their cherished pets – to raise money for homeless animals for the Humane Society of Southern Arizona.

Last October 27-30 attendees at the ninth annual Culinary Festival enjoyed some of the city's best food creations and sampled wine, beer, and spirits from around the world. A portion of the proceeds from the popular event benefited welfare and medical programs for Tucson women and children.

On December 15<sup>th</sup> the Tucson Originals partnered with Safeway to donate 200 large turkeys to the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona.

Gift certificates for individual restaurants are sold quarterly at 25% off. The Tucson Originals Reward Card Program lets you accumulate points for each dollar you spend and then apply those points for discounts at any of the participating restaurants. You should see Pat managing our way through these opportunities. It's actually fun!

You can also buy gift cards that can be used at any of the Tucson Originals restaurants. This will be the third straight holiday season that Pat and I have bought gift cards for Tucson family members – our “original” gift for the holidays.

Tucson Originals has a very well organized Web site ([tucsonoriginals.com](http://tucsonoriginals.com)) that shows you all the details of their organization, participating restaurants (including locations), and how to get the most for your dollar. For additional information you can call Executive Director Colette Landeen at 520-343-9985.



*This logo is featured in Tucson Originals advertising. (Courtesy of Tucson Originals)*