



Chocolate: The Perfect Excuse for a Festival! July 2006

October 13 - 19, 2006 in Coquitlam, Port Moody and Port Coquitlam, it's the West Coast Chocolate Festival, for the senses and the soul, a celebration of chocolate and all that it inspires. What better reason for a little pampering and self-indulgence than the Mayans' best kept secret, the food of the gods and all its recently-proven benefits.

No longer just the sugary treat we all grew up with, chocolate has clearly graduated to top-drawer food-tasting status, and festival organizers continue to delight their largely adult audience with new events, new tastings, and of course – new and emerging performers and artists at all events.

“This year, for example,” says festival organizer Linda Baker, “we’re devoting an entire Chocolate, Port & More location to beer and chocolate pairings. Sounds crazy, I know, but there’s some wonderfully surprising flavour pairings with some of these new ‘designer’ beers. We’ll have new pairing line-ups at the other three locations of this event as well, and there’ll be new discoveries at other favourite events – All Things Chocolate, Chocolate Chip Pancake Breakfast, Chocolate Factory Tours, Chocolate Pamper Party (a new take on last year’s Chocolate Spa Night), and the grand finale Chocolat ce Soir – and likely even more international entries to Coquitlam Library’s Poetry of Chocolate contest, and more literary-themed cakes at Port Moody Library’s popular Cakewalk.”

Guests can also follow this year’s new Chocolate Trail and be treated to sampling and promotions at local businesses, and at some of the region’s best restaurants, a special fixed-price chocolate festival menu. Festival organizers expect chocolate businesses outside the region will also participate, as they have in the festival’s big sampling event, All Things Chocolate, and that the Chocolate Trail will eventually be a map handed out at all tourism outlets in the Lower Mainland, also promoting the Coquitlam and area festival.

“It may seem frivolous to do all this just for chocolate,” says festival organizer Linda Baker, “but it was always all about supporting youth, showcasing emerging talent, and engaging youth in the actual production of the festival.”

The festival has fund-raised for youth arts programs, donating \$2,000 to PoCoMo Youth Society’s Outreach Bus for its arts-related programs, and recognizing last year’s ‘Chocolat ce Soir’ celebrity chef Bernard Casavant with a bursary in his

name to Brody White, a rising young chef chosen to assist The Peartree's Scott Yaeger to represent Canada in the 2007 Bocuse d'Or in France.

But recently the non-profit Society that runs the festival voted to focus primarily on creating more mentored work experiences and training opportunities for youth.

"Our youth are capable of great things," says Baker, "it's up to us in the community to create opportunities to mentor and support them, ideally paying them but also helping them get valuable volunteer work experience. This festival is about events, hospitality, tourism, marketing, culinary arts, organizational management, and so much more. We've been doing this instinctively from the beginning – now it's time to generate some serious funding so we can do more."

Past volunteers are asked to register again this year, before festival slots are offered to new volunteers. The festival is also looking for students keen to get some work experience under their belt over the summer, although these opportunities will also continue until after the festival.

Organizers are also pursuing more partnerships with local schools, like last year's win/win experience with Heritage Woods Secondary in Port Moody whose students received industry training from festival sponsors and provided first-class venue set-up and meal service to Chocolat ce Soir, and the one with Gleneagle Secondary in Coquitlam whose top culinary arts students were invited to prep the event's meal with world-class chef Bernard Casavant.

For more information, www.chocolatefestival.ca Volunteers or students e-mail info@chocolatefestival.ca, or call the festival's Admin. Manager Pam Palmer at 604-469-0265.