



Contact: Joanna Leung
Tel: (778)882-1216
E-mail: jleungf@alumni.sfu.ca

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.

CHOCOLATE: A MOUTH-WATERING WAY TO SUPPORT YOUTH

Chocolate festival provides opportunities for youths to work with industry professionals and develop employable skills for demanding job market.

Chocolate is a special food that not only nurtures our body and spirit but also nurtures youths in the TriCities in diverse ways. Generally from high school to college age, youth volunteers help organize, promote, and run many aspects of this year's West Coast Chocolate Festival, while gaining valuable work experience and employment skills and having fun!

Mrs. Marilyn Nunn, a Tourism/Hospitality teacher from Heritage Woods Secondary School in Port Moody, introduced her eleventh and twelfth grade students to the practical knowledge of the hospitality industry by involving thirty of them at the festivals 'Chocolat ce Soir' winemaker's dinner and floor show in 2005. "It was absolutely fabulous for them [because it's an even more formal event," says Nunn. "They really get a feeling of what it is like to have a big formal event in the community, and they take skills they've learned in class and use them in the real world. It is very lucky to have an event that they can work at."

Students recruited from Gleneagle Secondary's top-notch culinary arts program were chosen to prep the meal with world-class Chef Bernard, and Nunn's students received 5-star hotel banquet training from industry trainer and sommelier John Gerum and then set up the venue and served the meal.

"Chocolat ce Soir did help me in believing in myself and gave me experience and confidence so when I go into my interview, I got it." Grade 12 student Katrina Hoffer said. "I learned lots of people skills working in the kitchen of Metropolitan Hotel with many other cooks," said aspiring chef Shaun Roos.

"(John Gerum) taught us how to serve, and how to put the plate down," Grade 12 student Kendall Chan said, "I learned to mingle with people...and getting the opportunity to network with important people and professionals in the community."

Heritage Woods Secondary students all said, “Doing it again for sure!”, when asked if they will be involved in this year’s festival.

Pinetree Secondary business students are getting involved for the first time, as ‘Chocolate Rep for a Day’, representing local businesses like *Charlie’s Chocolate Factory* and *Chocolate Works* at the popular **All Things Chocolate** sampling event. Students receive factory tour training and mentoring from the business they’ll represent, to complement the festival’s own internal *Chocolate Wave* training showing how cocoa beans are grown and processed, the history of chocolate, and why it is good for you. (*Chocolate Wave* is now available for viewing in pdf format on the festival’s website.)

Centennial Secondary students have risen to the challenge as well, signing up for their first year with the festival for jobs like leading chocolate factory tours, helping run chocolate fountain-dipping festival promotions, and teaching local kids at library storytimes how to eat chocolate properly and how cocoa beans are grown and processed.

Festival lead sponsor, Thrifty Foods, figures prominently in the growing youth mentoring mission of the festival, offering for the first time outside the company, a portion of its ‘SMILES’ customer service training to recently-recruited students. Known for its superior customer service, Thrifty’s training represents enormous value to local youth, even before their festival shift begins.

Douglas College Music Department joins the festival this year too, helping recruit emerging talent performers for various festival events like students Randy Morrison, an aspiring movie composer and talented sax soloist, and Dragana, an accomplished flautist.

Not to be outdone by their senior counterparts, leadership students at Pitt River Middle School are also learning the art of event design and decoration, and how-to volunteer skills which they’ll put to good use at this year’s Willy Wonka-themed **Chocolate Chip Pancake Breakfast** at Wilson Centre in downtown Port Coquitlam. “Our main target for work experience is high school and post-secondary students,” says festival organizer Linda Baker. “But Pitt River is a great community school, their students live and learn in the downtown area of Port Coquitlam, and they’re very excited to be working with the community on a fun event like this. Another win/win!”

Next year, the West Coast Chocolate Festival plans to welcome a *Youth Matters!*-organized visual arts event to its event line-up, and will work with *Youth Matters!* to continue to leverage the magic of chocolate to benefit local

youth. "It's chocolate!" says Baker. "Almost everybody loves it. Why not use this wonderful medium to the greatest benefit possible for our youth and our community.!"

Find more information about West Coast Chocolate Festival, or to volunteer to help grow the festival and its nurturing of local youth, go to www.chocolatefestival.ca or contact Linda Baker, Festival Organizer at (604)939-8068.