

The Stamford Times

Cook-off to feature maple syrup dishes; raise awareness for nature center

Posted: Wednesday, February 2, 2011 12:00 am

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STAMFORD -- Sweet tooths will be put to the test on Saturday, Feb. 5, for the second annual Maple Sugar Sunday Chef's Challenge at First County Bank.

During the challenge, three local chefs will put out several different foods using maple syrup as an ingredient for the public to taste. The public will then vote on which recipe they like the best.

David Cingari, owner of David's Soundview Catering in Stamford, said this is his first time participating in the challenge, and he is looking forward to it.

"I have cooked for plenty of chef tasting events, but never where one specific flavor was highlighted," said Cingari. "We have several items on our menu that we think the public will really enjoy. We are featuring a certain maple syrup in every recipe from Sugar Bush Farms in Vermont."

According to Karen Kelly, director of marketing and sales at First County Bank, the bank came up with the idea to have a chef's challenge last year to raise awareness and donations for the Stamford Museum & Nature Center, which hosts its Maple Sugar Sunday family festival each March.

"We recognized the popularity of food shows and competitions, and we wanted to highlight a unique event," said Kelly. "This is a family event with free food, gifts and a lot of fun."

Cingari said his menu will have a breakfast theme because the event is in the morning.

"We have four items featuring maple syrup," said Cingari. "We will feature a maple granola over vanilla yogurt, maple sausage patties, silver-dollar pancakes and maple- and spice-glazed bacon grissini, which is a thin breadstick with bacon wrapped around it. An array of things for people to try."

John Barricelli, owner of Sono Baking Company & Café in Norwalk, said he is very excited to be in the chef's challenge.

"We are doing a maple shortbread," said Barricelli. "It will be fun, and we have a lot of experience using maple syrup in recipes we use for the cafe."

Defending champion Robin Selden, from Marcia Selden Catering and Event Planning in Stamford, said she plans on winning the challenge again this year.

"We are going the sweet and savory route," said Selden. "Everyone has a sweet tooth, and we are really excited for people to try our three recipes."

Selden said she wants her recipes to be a surprise, but added that the items are very different from what she made last year, which were homemade soft pretzels infused with maple syrup and served with a maple syrup mustard.

"We are going to use the Stamford Museum & Nature Center's maple syrup again this year," said Selden. "Our recipes were very well received last year, and we are hoping they will be again this year."

According to Will Kies, director of education at the Stamford Museum & Nature Center, this event ties into the whole maple syrup season.

"We have wonderful local chefs here that are going to highlight the different ways you can use maple syrup in everyday cooking," said Kies. "The maple syrup season lasts for about six weeks, and this is a great way to come out of your house during the winter and celebrate it."

The top two chefs of the challenge will have a final cook off on Sunday, March 6, at the Stamford Museum & Nature Center, during Maple Sugar Sunday. The chef's challenge will be held at First County Bank, located at 1042 High Ridge Road, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.