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## Cookies for a Cause

By Susie Iventosch



Coconut chocolate chip shortbread with chocolate ganache Photos Susie Iventosch

The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano recently held its annual fundraiser luncheon, "An Afternoon in the Admiral's Garden: Survivor Mare Island." This year's event took on a Hawaiian theme and the weather certainly seemed tropical in the upper 90s. This made it a wee bit difficult to keep chocolate from melting, but the Dreyer's ice cream was a big hit. The core mission of the Food Bank is to alleviate hunger, and guests (and volunteers) left the festive June 27th event anything but hungry.

The annual fundraiser is in its 10th year and features a catered lunch, in addition to "tasting tents." These are tented areas out on the lawn, in which food and wine vendors and restaurant chefs sample their fare for appetizers and dessert before and after the catered lunch. There is plenty of delicious food to go around. And it is a really fun atmosphere, with both silent and live auctions, all set in the beautiful gardens of the Admiral's mansion on Mare Island. One can always spot a celebrity or two at this luncheon. I happened to spy former major league baseball star Vida Blue, a long-time contributor to this organization.

"The event raised about \$100,000 after expenses- an equivalent of 80,000 meals," said Marilu Boucher,

Development Director. "We were very pleased with this result, particularly in this economy."

Food drives, private donations, grants, special events and plenty of volunteer hours fund the balance of the organization's annual budget.

The Food Bank serves 130,000 people per month in literally hundreds of locations. These venues include many nonprofit partners, as well as the Food Bank's own distribution programs. Through this network, the Food Bank is able to provide an efficient and coordinated system for collecting and distributing food, in an effort to both reduce waste and increase public awareness about hunger and food security issues in both counties. The organization's vision is to ensure that all people in Contra Costa and Solano counties will receive at least one nutritious meal each day.

"We have a presence in every community in both Contra Costa and Solano counties," Boucher pointed out. "We are very appreciative of the generosity of the guests at this event and the community in general. With such support, we are able reach out to everyone who comes to us in need. The number of people we have been able to reach has increased 30 percent in the past two years. This is an achievement we could not have accomplished without the tremendous support of the community."

The Food Bank is a private, non-profit organization. For more information, please visit <http://www.foodbankccs.org/>.



coconut chocolate chip shortbread cookies

(Makes about 6 dozen mini cookies)

These tasty little cookies made with coconut seemed the perfect touch for a Hawaiian theme. So my mom and I set about making 500 or so of the little nuggets for the event. They are very easy, and can be frozen for serving at a later date. Because they are made in tiny little rounds, beware, it is not possible to eat just one!

#### INGREDIENTS

1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened to room temperature

1/2 cup powdered sugar

2 cups flour

1/4 teaspoon sea salt

1/2 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup baking coconut, finely grated or hopped

1/2 cup mini chocolate chips (If you prefer bittersweet, which I do, then chop larger chips in a wooden bowl until much smaller in size. This is not so easy, but is delicious!)

#### DIRECTIONS

In a mixing bowl, blend butter and powdered sugar on low speed of electric mixer until well integrated. Stir in vanilla and coconut, and mix until blended. Add flour and salt and beat on low speed, just until mixed. Finally, stir in chocolate chips. Gather dough into two balls and roll each into a log, approximately 1 1/4-inches in diameter, or roll dough into small, 3/4-inch diameter balls. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes. When ready to bake, preheat oven to 350 degrees, slice dough with a sharp knife into 1/4-inch slices, or if using balls, simply flatten to 1/4-inch or so with a spatula or clean hands. Place on ungreased baking sheet or Silpat mat. Bake for 15-18 minutes, or until just beginning to brown. Remove from oven and cool. If you'd like to make your shortbread cookies even more decadent, melt a little bittersweet chocolate and spoon a little over the top of each (cooled) cookie. Before the chocolate has a chance to set, sprinkle some angel flake coconut on top and press down slightly.

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