

Published November 23rd, 2011

Olive Friends

By Susie Iventosch



EJ Keller at the Olive Festival Photo provided

Last month, the Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area (FWRNA) hosted the second annual Olive Festival, complete with local olive oil-tasting from the McCauley olive orchards, olive branch crown-making and even an Olive Expo, which displayed an olive oil lamp and an olive oil collector fashioned after those invented by the Greeks two thousand years ago.

And no true competitor was left idle with an olive pit spitting contest, in addition to games of "stuff the olive", "olive pizza party" and "olive regatta."

Besides the contests and tastings, EJ Keller, owner of Orinda's Carotte et Caviar, and I conducted cooking demonstrations for the guests. EJ made a wonderful fig-olive tapenade, while I made Greek olive-feta scones.

The event, which attracted more than 100 contributors and hundreds of attendees, raised a total of \$7,000 from the event.

"Every dollar [raised] supports the Wagner Ranch Nature Area programs such as: Thanksgiving, Pioneer Days, and regular educational activities, for Orinda students in grades 3 through 5," said board member Shirley Heichel.

According to Heichel, the board responded proactively to this statement from the School District: "In 2009, the school district was forced to eliminate the nature area naturalist position as a result of continuing cuts in state funding."

The FWRNA, a nonprofit dedicated to environmental education and social studies for Orinda youth since 1970, stepped in to provide funding for nature aides and other costs of running the program. The historical Wagner Ranch site boasts an olive orchard, planted by the original Wagner family, with many olive trees that are 130 years old.

Many local volunteer groups and individuals came together to make this event a huge success. There were master gardeners, recycling organizations, native bird experts, Boy Scouts, and the Orinda Historical Society, just to name a few.

Shirley Heichel reminded me of a famous Shakespearian quote, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

And, the truth in that statement is evident when it comes to community members pulling together for an event like the Olive Festival. The Republic of Cake was very generous in allowing us to use their kitchen to prepare food for the event. Thank you!

About Chef EJ Keller

Originally from San Francisco, Edward (EJ) Keller travelled to France in 1995 with his French wife. He was immediately won over by the French attitude toward cooking and eating, and quickly decided to make a professional career of cooking.

Over the course of ten years, he worked inside the French kitchen scene and in a short time, worked his way up through several historical and prestigious Parisian restaurants, including: Le Grand Vefour, L'Escargot Montorgueil, Jacques Cagna, and Cabaret. In search of increased client contact and greater menu creativity, he left the restaurant kitchens behind and now works directly with individuals in their homes (both in Paris and in California), to create meals and culinary events based on the values of fine dining with good friends.

Carotte et Caviar is a personal chef service designed for food lovers, that offers a "chef in your home" for parties and gatherings, market tours, meals in advance and cooking workshops.

Carotte et Caviar in California
6 Duncan Court
Orinda, CA 94563
Cell (925) 876-4941
Office (925) 876-4941
chef@carottecaviar.com
www.carottecaviar.com

EJ Keller's Olive and Fig Tapenade

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup pitted Kalamata olives
1 peeled clove of garlic
1/4 cup walnuts
4 ripe figs
6-8 springs of fresh mint
1/2 cup cream cheese, softened
2 heads of Belgian endive, leaves separated and washed, or slices of cucumber
1-2 tablespoons Balsamic vinegar

DIRECTIONS

In a food processor, puree 1/2 cup pitted Kalamata olives with a peeled clove of garlic. Add 1/4 cup of walnuts and pulse a few times, leaving the walnuts in small pieces. Transfer to a mixing bowl. Chop 4 ripe figs and add to the olive mix. Finely chop the leaves from 6 or 8 sprigs of mint and add to the mix. Stir in 1/2 cup of cream cheese and mix all the ingredients together. Serve on top of endive leaves or slices of cucumber and drizzle with a few drops of balsamic vinegar. Enjoy!

Olive-Feta Scones with Parmesan



Scones-Olive Feta Parmesan Photo Susie Iventosch

Created by Susie for the Wagner Ranch Nature Center Olive Festival fundraiser

(Makes about 2 dozen)

INGREDIENTS

1 cup self-rising flour (can substitute with 1 cup regular flour plus 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder and 1/4 teaspoon salt)
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 teaspoon dried mustard
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
4 tablespoons unsalted butter (1/2 stick), cut into small pieces
1/4 cup coarsely chopped Kalamata olives
1/4 cup coarsely chopped Greek green olives
1/3 cup grated Parmesan (plus 1/4 cup grated Parmesan for topping)

1/3 cup crumbled Feta cheese

1 egg

1/3-1/2 cup half & half

DIRECTIONS

In a large mixing bowl place flour, salt, cayenne pepper, dried mustard and thyme. Mix well with a wire whisk. With pastry cutter or fingertips, cut in butter until well-integrated. Stir in Parmesan, feta and olives. In a small bowl, mix egg with half and half and stir well. Pour into dries and mix well. Turn onto floured board and roll out to a thickness of about 3/4 inch. (If too moist, simply knead a little more flour into dough.) Cut into small rounds using a 1 1/2 inch diameter biscuit cutter. Place on baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Brush tops lightly with olive oil, and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake at 400F for approximately 10-12 minutes, or until golden brown.

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA