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Mayor Mendonca and Her Marvelous Master Chefs

By Susie Iventosch

From left: Karen Mendonca, Hugo Figueroa and Bruce Burns Photo provided

I just learned a tidbit about Moraga Mayor Karen Mendonca and Moraga School District Superintendent Bruce Burns. They both love to cook, and are quite accomplished cooks at that! On September 10, they teamed up with Chef Hugo Figueroa of Moraga's Terzetto Cuisine to bring home fifth place in the 3rd Annual Mayor's Healthy Cookoff. The primary goal of the event, promoted by the Wellness City Challenge, is to bring civic leaders, chefs and educators together to fight obesity and promote healthy eating.

This year's contest imposed a few new rules, one of which required each team to use only products available to all other participants at the Farmers' Market, eggs supplied by the local 4-H members, plus other assorted ingredients provided supplied by Whole Foods. Each team also had to create an egg dish, and produce some type of salsa from available ingredients.

Team Moraga put on a beautiful spread of grilled salmon with a peach salsa, garden omelets and Chef Hugo's Eggs Benedict, which happened to be one of his favorite dishes!

"It was an amazing experience," remarked Figueroa. "I would do it all over again, because I really enjoyed working with our mayor and Bruce Burns, too."

The common thread for all three members of Team Moraga is that they all had family members who greatly influenced their love of cooking.

Mayor Mendonca's Austrian grandfather was a chef, and her grandmother was a gourmet cook, as was her own mother. Her Portuguese father raised all of the family's vegetables in his huge, immaculately tended garden.

"Growing up in Sebastopol, I used to love going out to the orchard to pull up a carrot or two to munch on," noted the mayor. "I also enjoyed the harvest of Gravenstein apples, plums, cherries, prunes, peaches and pears."

Superintendent Burns enjoys meal preparations almost as much as the meal itself, and remembers cooking alongside his dad, who was a gourmet in his own right. He was a member of the gourmet club "Engine 65," so named for the old San Francisco firehouse where they met.

"Our family benefited from all the recipes he used to test on us in preparation for his annual turn at providing dinner to the members of the group," Burns said.

It was part of the family routine for Burns and his siblings to help prepare dinner.

"There were six of us, so help was needed," Burns pointed out. "While a 'chore', it was also a learning and family-time opportunity. I never really minded assisting, and in fact, now I find great satisfaction in being patient with preparations … taking the time to slice and dice food as part of the culmination of the products coming together."

Chef Figueroa, who has been with Terzetto Cuisine for the past 15 years, is a self-made cook who was inspired by his mom.

"I always wanted to do something important in my life," he said. "Terzetto owner Roos Pal gave me this opportunity to experiment my knowledge of cooking. I can connect with the people of Moraga and now I have a big family. I am proud to be Terzetto's chef, because we at the Terzetto family believe in healthy and fresh cooking."

And as cooking enthusiasts all three members of Team Moraga said the Mayor's Cookoff was a very worthwhile cause and all would do it again if given the opportunity.

"This event was all about fun competition amongst our neighboring cities to arrive at healthy cooking strategies using fresh, locally-grown produce and creative cooking strategies," reflected the mayor. "I believe that it is important to demonstrate how easily we can all cook healthy, tasty, nutritional meals made from sustainable, local produce."

Though I was not able to get Chef Hugo's exact recipes from the "Cookoff", he did say he makes his eggs Benedict with fresh spinach and sliced tomatoes. He also was kind enough to share his fresh fruit muffin recipe, which is a favorite for Terzetto customers. He says you can use any fresh fruit, and I chose blueberries and white nectarines. Yummy!

Terzetto Cuisine
1419 Moraga Way
Moraga, CA 94556
(925) 376-3832
Hour of Operation: Mon: 6.30 to 2.00 pm

Tuesday to Sunday: 6.30- 8.30 pm
Open all day Tue to Sun
For more information about Terzetto Cuisine, please visit: www.terzettocuisine.com
For information on the Wellness City Challenge, please visit: http://wellnesscitychallenge.com

Chef Hugo's Fresh Fruit Muffins

Photo Susie Iventosch

(Yields approximately 16-18 giant muffins, or 24-26 regular sized muffins)

INGREDIENTS
4 cups flour
1 cup white sugar
21/2 cups brown sugar
2 tablespoons baking powder
Pinch of salt and cinnamon
1 cup milk
1 cup canola oil
5 eggs, beaten lightly
11/2 cups fruit of choice (berries, peaches, nectarines, apples, etc.)

DIRECTIONS
Preheat oven to 325F on *convection, or 350F for conventional oven.

Place all dries in a large mixing bowl and mix well. In a separate bowl, whisk oil, milk and eggs. Pour egg mixture into dry mixture and stir until well integrated. Fold in fruit. (If using berries use whole and if using larger fruit, cut into small pieces.)

Pour batter into prepared or paper-lined muffin tins and bake until centers are done and a cake tester comes out clean. Cooking time will depend upon the size muffins you make, and also whether you use pure convection, convection-bake, or a regular bake setting on your oven. Muffins should be golden-brown on top and done in the center, when ready. I used convection-bake and found it took almost 30 minutes for the larger muffins, and 20-25 for the regular sized muffins.

*For information on converting from conventional to convection ovens here is a good website:
http://www.broilking.com/convection_cooking.html

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

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