

Mac 'n' cheese, redone



By **ALLISON KARCH**

I'll say it loud and proud, I love mac 'n' cheese. And no, I don't mean KD.

Though it holds a special place in my heart, Kraft Dinner is a horse of a very different (ie. fluorescent orange) colour. What I'm talking about is traditional elbow macaroni in a homemade, gooey cheese sauce, with any kind of add-ins the chef feels inspired to toss. If you share this love, get your eating pants ready for Saturday, March 17.

That's the day that Mount Royal Arts Core School hosts its first annual Culinary Cook Off. The inaugural battle dish will be mac 'n' cheese, a humble classic that the contestants will surely elevate to haute cuisine.

"Mac 'n' cheese is just one of those wonderful comfort foods and it's fun to see how the various chefs involved put their own unique twist on [it]," says Cook Off organizer and local food blogger, Karlynn Johnston. "Also, because the event is for the school, we picked a food that kids love."

A number of notable professional chefs from around Edmonton are competing, including those that head the kitchens of Zinc, The Marc, Hardware Grill and Battista's Calzone Co. In fact, the Cook-Off's website is so packed with pros that I assumed the contest was only open to those with industry experience or a Red Seal – not so, says Johnston.

"It actually isn't limited to professional chefs," Johnston said. "The cards just happened to fall that way and we were lucky to have so many of them jump at the opportunity to compete."

And the Cook Off isn't just a competition, it's a capital-e Event. Besides sampling the edible entries, there will be live music from Albertan singer/songwriter Belinda Sage, a silent auction, a live art auction and a raffle.

It gets better. In this raffle, you could win the "coveted fourth judge position." That's right, some lucky attendee will be a judge in the competition alongside three local foodie luminaries. Here's a quick look at the three known judges:

Liane Faulder writes a weekly food column for the *Edmonton Journal*, and the Canadian Food Bloggers Association named her blog, *Eat My Words*, the Best Regional Blog in 2010.

NAIT's very own Stanley Townsend is the current program chair of Culinary Arts and has scads of culinary education of his own from a number of institutions.

Local food blogger, professional foods educator, advocate, writer and editor, A Canadian Foodie (aka Valerie Lugonja) will also bring her expertise and enthusiasm to the judge's table.

The tasting portion of the Cook Off runs from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 17, at Mount Royal School (11303 55 St.). Remember to get there early for a chance to win the fourth judging spot!

Even if you don't, you can still vote for your favourite in the People's Choice Award.



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Cook Off Organizer Karlynn Johnston

Bowls of each contestant's mac 'n' cheese are available for \$1 and all proceeds go to Mount Royal Arts Core programming.

As for future Culinary Cook-Offs, Johnston says that they're still working on ideas, and I know mac 'n' cheese will be hard to top.

If any of you food-minded readers have a great idea for a competition dish – or want to compete yourself next year – drop the organizers a line on their website, www.theculinaryartscookoff.com, or on Twitter, @culinarycookoff.