Arts&Culture

ArtBeat



Hot stuff in high-calorie competition

By Michael Gurney

The number of young culinary artists participating in the second-annual Great Gibsons Cookie Competition organized by the Gibsons Public Library this year grew to a baker's dozen.

Following a heated contest on Saturday, Nov. 22, Stella Straka topped the round for bakers aged 11 and younger. Her gluten-free Chocolate Crinkle Cookie attracted the judges' attention for its delicious accommodation of dietary restrictions.

In the category for bakers aged 12 and older, Alexander Nando emerged victorious with his Double Chocolate Macadamia Nut Cookie.

Spectators cast votes for a People's Choice award, with votes evenly split between Noa Talbot-MacNab's Peanut Pop! Cookie and Skylar Lamont's Chewy Apple Cinnamon Cookie.

"I love food," said Lisa Furfaro, who oversees programming for the Gibsons Public Library and founded the baking competition last year. "Any way I can incorporate food into programming just touches my soul, but it has also become such an intergenerational event, with so many kids and adults working together. There's so much literacy to be learned working in the kitchen together: you're learning math, you're learning how to read a recipe, you're being creative."

Three celebrity judges sampled each entry and deliberated to select the winners: local promoter Scotty Collison, *Coast Reporter* editor Bronwyn Beairsto, and the youth representative to the Gibsons Library board of directors, Levi Cottrell (also a Grade 12 student at Elphinstone Secondary School).

"I love to be a kind of community member bringing people together," said Collison, who co-founded the Coastal Hosts event management company with Faye Kiewitz. "I've always wanted to start my own little baked good thing. Just wait until I crash and burn out of this host job, and then you can have some Scotty's baked goods."

"My grandma's been baking for me my whole life," said Cottrell. "I can't do it myself, but I've been able to eat her baking and get to understand the different ins and outs of what makes a cookie great. And that's what we found today: great cookies."

Beairsto returned for her second year as a cookie competition judge, applying her editorial skillset to assess consistency, integrity and flavour of submissions. "I am a terrible baker," she admitted, "but these cookies are all awe-inspiring because if I tried to make one of those cookies it just wouldn't work out. So this is my excuse to eat some really amazing cookies — and to get to meet the great bakers of the future."

This year, Furfaro updated the event's format, allowing bakers to respond to interrogation (and praise) from the judging panel. "We just love bringing people into the library," said Furfaro. "It's the last free space, and sometimes when you try different kinds of programming, it might just pique somebody's interest and get them in."

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PERSEPHONE

Fibre farm to become high-touch hotbed of arts, dialogue

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A few steps from one of the busiest thoroughfares in the Gibsons area, a more tranquil intersection is taking root.

The Fibre Farm, a new community hub for land-centred art programming and disability justice, was officially inaugurated during a groundbreaking gathering on Nov. 22.

As ferry-bound highway traffic roared past the site at the Persephone Brewing Company, adults and children rolled loamy packets of soil, glacial marine clay, and indigenous plant seeds.

The project is the result of collaboration between the Sunshine Coast Arts Council and the Persephone farm brewery that draws on funding from the Island Coastal Economic Trust and the BC Arts Council.

Lead artist T'uy't'tanat Cease Wyss designed an outdoor space that will eventually include accessible garden beds and decking in view of remediated marshland wreathed by willows and salmonberries.

"That's phase one," said Sadira Rodrigues, director of the Sunshine Coast Arts Council. "Our hope is that in phases two and three we'll be able to build an accessible studio because the Persephone Kiosk [an artist residency space run with The Only Animal Theatre Society] isn't accessible right now."

Wyss, a matriarch of Skwxwu7mesh, Sto:lo and Hawaiian heritage, is an ethnobotanist and community-based educator. "As the garden grows, community will grow around it," said Wyss as she prepared nuggets of stinging nettles and cattails for planting. "My hope is that Squamish people and people from the shíshálh Nation will become more visible through this project to their neighbours, to see how their knowledge will come in and be very applicable to this work."

"The materials that coastal peoples have used for centuries — like cedar bark, root and boughs — and wool from the Salish Woolly dog, the mountain goat, and plant fibres all have a connection to each other," added Wyss. "It's a beautiful story that will start to evolve more as the community grows, and I see it really growing and blossoming just like the garden itself."

The harvesting of natural fibres grown at the site will lead to related art practices like weaving and dyeing. For Megan Dewar, a mosaic artist who is coordinating access for the project, the tactile qualities of locally grown fibres provide a portal to experiential learning.



MICHAEL GURNEY PHOTO

T'uy't'tanat Cease Wyss, Megan Dewar and Jaz Whitford assemble on wetlands in Gibsons designated as the Fibre Farm.

"There is so often a division between the experience of disability and being in the natural world," said Dewar, who uses a wheelchair for mobility. "To me, fibre and textile art is an extension of being in the natural world. My motivation in this project is to create experiences where folks with disabilities can engage with and use the arts to mend that gap. Processing natural materials with your hands, wearing them as clothing, it creates a closeness and a relationship to the natural environment."

The Fibre Farm complex will include a gathering deck and fire pit, both accessible to people with disabilities. Inclusivity is tightly woven into the project's approach. Even the invasive species being pulled from the site will be processed into crafted works. "They're not going to become waste," said Dewar.

The first harvest of fibre-bearing plants is expected next year.

"One of my favourite things is to remediate areas and to bring in new garden projects with communities," said Wyss. "I like to work with the whole community so everybody knows what it's about, and to make it fun, too."

Jaz Whitford, a member of the Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc Nation, began working in concert with Wyss 10 years ago and will help implement the Fibre Farm vision. "Cease invited me to be part of [an earlier project] after she injured herself," Whitford said. "I didn't have a lot of experience with plants in a professional way — it was all very casual and learned from my family — but I ended up picking it up and managing the crew."

During Saturday's rain-doused groundbreaking, volunteers prepared the soil and seeded the boggy terrain with stinging nettles, milkweed, goldenrod, hardhack shrubs, and camus (a perennial plant in the lily family).

"We really like how this project will encourage diverse community conversations," said Wyss, "and seeing people interacting as neighbours in a common space that's been gifted to us to do something really meaningful."