

Weekly Dish

Notes from the local food scene

By Luke Steere
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• **Italian chef at SNHU:** On Tuesday, Oct. 30, at 5:30 p.m., meet Italian chef Lorenzo Polegri at Southern New Hampshire University's Hospitality Center (2500 N. River Road, Manchester), where he will be demonstrating techniques, signing books and meeting diners. Proceeds from the \$75-per-plate dinner will help students travel abroad. Lorenzo is the director of the Monini Culinary Center in Spoleto, Umbria, where he holds cooking classes, wine pairings and olive oil tastings. He has made cooking appearances in Greece, England, Ireland, Antigua, Canada and the United States, where he has prepared meals for diners at the White House, the United Nations headquarters in New York City, the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco and the Bedford Village Inn in New Hampshire. For reservations, call 629-4608 or email finedine@snhu.edu.

• **Jake's leaves Amherst:** This isn't a farewell, however. Jake's Old Fashioned Ice Cream & Bakeshop is closing its Carriage Depot location, said chef and owner Roni Vetter. Sunday, Nov. 4, will be the last day there before the company relocates to Palm Square in Nashua (57 Palm St.), a bigger facility from which it will continue offering super premium ice cream (in pints and quarts) and handmade candies, cakes, pastries and pies to customers. "We have quite a sales business, which has increased three-fold in last two years, and the facility isn't conducive to where I want to take the business," Vetter said, adding her products have done well at stores like Harvest Market in Bedford and Hollis, and Bright Spot in Nashua. Vetter also talked about expanding to more restaurant menus. Jake's Ice Cream Truck, seasonally active, will still be available for events and fundraisers.

• **Chili winners:** Cactus Jack's (782 S. Willow St., Manchester; 1182 Union Ave., Laconia) Texas Chili earned the people's choice award for best chili at the New England Chili Classic, held Oct. 13 and Oct. 14 at Veterans Park in Manchester. Hungry voters sampled chilis from more than a dozen local eateries at the event. "[All] our beef is ground fresh, and the chili was made fresh today, and it shows. The effort pays off. The key for us is fresh, fresh, fresh," said Corporate Chef Nicole Barreira in a press release. In addition to people's choice, there were judges' winners: Top overall honors went to the Hanover Street Chophouse (149 Hanover St., Manchester), which also

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FOOD

Local candy makers treat us all

For these foodies, Halloween is a time to shine

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It often seems quantity drives the treats at Halloween — who can fill a plastic jack-o-lantern candy pail the fastest, and how big can a popcorn ball be made before it collapses under its own weight? — but these New Hampshire sweets-makers focus on quality and creativity.

Walpole-based L.A. Burdick Chocolates (47 Main St., Walpole) considers its chocolates a "really serious product [made] with a sweet gastronomical approach," says Head Chocolatier Michael Klug. This time of year, he said, the business is busy supplying retail locations in Boston, Cambridge and New York City. Burdick's flagship Walpole store offers the same tasty treats as well as a café. There's an online store as well.

Burdick makes candy "coffin boxes" for Halloween; "they are extremely popular, as is our 'graveyard of sweets.' So it can be a little dark," Klug said, noting there's an "interesting, whimsical beauty to both the chocolates and packaging."

The natural shape of apples also gives beauty to the season. A Little Confection (124 N. Main St., Concord) is one of several candy shops that offers a specialty variation on the caramel apple. Theirs are dipped, then doused with chocolate and made to look like pumpkins and ghosts.

Chocolate molds in lots of shapes bring Halloween to Granite State Candy Shoppe (13 Warren St., Concord; 832 Elm St., Manchester) with white, milk and dark chocolate, sold alongside an autumn jelly bean mix, candy corn and more. Granite State covers real apples in a variety of toppings, like oreo and peanut butter cup toppings.

Early October marks a seasonal change for Van Otis Chocolates' (341 Elm St., Manchester, 826-6874).

"Our fall seasonal collection is popular, but we tend to see a lot of it sold for gifts. Our pumpkin fudge pecan roll, which people like to cut up and put out for parties, and caramel apples, the cinnamon white chocolate or pecan turtle varieties, are the bestsellers," retail team leader Lakisha Mwano said.

With apples, Van Otis Master Chocolatier J.P. Pisciotta starts by caramel-coating Granny Smiths and dressing them in chocolate. Next come toppings: cinnamon sugar, almond butter crunch toffee mix or pecan bits, and an extra chocolate drizzle in milk, dark or white chocolate just before packaging. On store tables, apples

sit out among displays of solid Swiss chocolate pops in shapes of skulls, turkeys and maple leaves.

"Halloween is always a fun time," said Pisciotta, who began at Van Otis last year after relocating from Kansas City, Mo. "I enjoy doing the molds and show pieces," he said. "I've even done scary chocolate masks for people."

Martha's Exchange Sweet Shoppe (185 Main St., Nashua) carries a variety of locally made chocolates for the season — selections from Ava Marie Chocolates (43 Grove St. # 1, Peterborough) are top sellers. Merrimack's Swan Chocolates (436 Daniel Webster Hwy.) focuses mainly on Christmas, but there's something autumn-feeling about its handcrafted pecan turtle caramel clusters; its salted caramels (an eight-piece box for \$10); giant gourmet milk chocolate peanut butter cups (five for \$20) and bags of caramel crunch chocolate popcorn.

Fudge is popular year-round at The Candy Kingdom (235 Harvard St., Manchester) — it's their flagship product — and customers begin asking for pumpkin fudge around mid-August, before the pumpkins are even done growing, according to co-owner Dick Capers, who sells the fudge with his wife, Phyllis. "We use real cream, real butter and real pumpkin. It tastes delightful, like a pumpkin pie," Capers said. Candy Kingdom fudge is made in a kettle on the sales floor, 40 pounds at a time, Capers said. Caramel apple pie fudge and a new mudslide fudge have also been selling well, he said; the three fall flavors are among the 50 the store will put out during the year. In addition, Candy Kingdom carries 20 varieties of chocolate caramel dipped apples.

Mwano and the Caperses agree: The cost of higher-end candy may prohibit buying it en masse for the candy tray, but it does bring something special to the holiday.

Ben Fisk of Ben's Sugar Shack (83 Webster Hwy., Temple) ratchets up production of maple candy this time of year. "It's a different flavor than your typical Snickers or Twix bar, ... it's interesting to change up the flavors you're getting," Fisk said. For the past seven years he has handed out his maple cotton candy at his own house.

Up north is the Mill Fudge Factory (2 Central St., Bristol), which sells its fudge at A Market Natural Foods (125 Loring St., Manchester) and the Concord Coop (24 S. Main St., Concord). The factory offers pumpkin fudge with a secret blend of spices. It also comes hand-dipped in



L.A. Burdick Chocolatier Michael Klug. Courtesy photo.



L.A. Burdick's White Chocolate Molded Ghost. Courtesy photo.

Belgian White Chocolate as a fudge pop. Order online by Sunday, Oct. 28, for shipping on or before Halloween.

Back in Manchester, Richard Tango-Lowy of Dancing Lion Chocolate (917 Elm St., Manchester) is focused on the day after Halloween. Chocolate is the star of a Day of the Dead dinner he hosts on Nov. 1 at Consuelo's Taqueria (36 Amherst St., Manchester) with traditional Mayan drinking chocolate, a cacao-roasted chicken wrapped and served in a banana leaf, and bonbons crafted for the occasion.

He decided to team up with Consuelo's for a dinner to shed light on a holiday people don't know much about. "All-chocolate dinners are pretty traditional in Mexico," Tango-Lowy said.

"In the past we've done a salad with cacao and other dishes. It's fun to talk about how it's different than normal American perceptions about the dead. The Day of the Dead is about all of our dead having a good time," Tango-Lowy said. 🍷