

Meet your Iron Chefs: David Charyk



By Brock Weir

Oakland Hall's Dave Charyk has always been game for a challenge.

The chef, who got his start in the culinary world at King City's Hogan's Inn, is putting the skills he has honed from the age of 18 to face off against some of the best and brightest in Aurora's restaurant scene through Iron Chef Aurora.

Growing up with parents who were never ones to shy away from new and interesting eating experiences imparted him with a sense of culinary adventure, something he has kept with him throughout his career and hopes to display to a much wider audience come April 18. That is when the Aurora Community Centre is transformed into Kitchen Stadium for the event, with all proceeds going towards five local charities.

"My parents always liked different food and they used to experiment with different stuff," he recalls. "Then I went to trade school and that is when I found out cooking is what I really like to do. I started working at a short order place just off the 400 and then I went into Hogan's Inn and branched out from there. I truly enjoyed doing all sorts of different things with breads and making sauces and I always had a love for it.

"When I was doing my apprenticeship at Hogan's, it was a fun atmosphere. You could go into work and it was a bit more laid back than a normal 9-5 job and you had your reward right away when you cooked something; you would get the rewards of people being happy and that felt good."

Working at Hogan's Inn also picked up where his parents left off, making him comfortable with preparing meat and other delicacies that might seem unusual for the typical Canadian menu, including more exotic varieties of shellfish and ostrich.

Both shellfish and the rather large bird will play key roles along with the two secret ingredients that must be used by all five chefs when he steps up to the plate on April 18.

"I have a combination of French, Swiss, and generally European styles, and I also do my own styles," he says. "I tend to mix things up with Asian cuisine and just combine different techniques to try and come up with different stuff. For Iron Chef, I will be doing an ostrich carpaccio with a julienned salad, as well as a lobster thermidor that will incorporate the special ingredients. I think it should be a good mix; it will give them a little bit of variety."

Iron Chef Aurora is the brainchild of Debbie McGrath and Tim Newnham of Habachat, a local social media company, as a way to support and showcase local restaurants and show a wider audience what the chefs at some of the Town's more popular restaurants and food shops have to offer.

Tickets for Iron Chef were, as of Friday, selling fast at the restaurants and participating charities.

The Iron Chef event will be followed through the weekend with the Taste of Aurora Festival, taking over the Aurora Community Centre with a nominal fee and food bank item, with all proceeds to benefit the Aurora Food Pantry food bank. The Taste of Aurora will include not only restaurants but also cooking demonstration, health and wellness seminars, and live entertainment.

As a showcase for what he and his fellow chefs have to offer, Mr. Charyk says he hopes people come away with a more personal experience of not just Oakland Hall but all participants.

?I just hope what people take away from it is is when they come into a restaurant, it is not just a name, but they are able to put a face to the name,? he says. ?You can create a better relationship with your customers. People should come out just to try something different you're not normally going to try, and try something different from all the restaurants. It is a good opportunity to get a little taste of what to expect.?

Asked what his strongest advantage is going into the competition, he cites his experience as giving him an edge.

?I had my papers when I was 18 years old, but ever since I was twelve I was in there and flipping burgers,? he says.