

Road to Gold begins in Aurora for Canada's top chefs

In their pursuit of excellence, Canada's top chefs are setting up shop in Aurora.

The Aurora Armoury, which is home to the newest campus of Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute (CFWI), has been selected as the new practice location for Culinary Team Canada.

Culinary Team Canada was established more than 30 years ago to allow top chefs in the country to pursue excellence in the culinary arts, skills and craftsmanship while working to represent the country as Culinary Ambassadors of a cuisine that is uniquely Canadian and reflective of the cultural diversity and agricultural abundance of our country.

The team, which consists of chefs Olaf Mertens, Rahil Rathod, Jonathan Thauberger, Robert Graveline, Sydney Hamelin, Calvin Wat, Vish Myekar, Zagros Leung, Yue Long, Daley Soloman, Peter Dewar, Russ Thayer, Rebecca van Bommel and Hannah Bowering, will be using the Armoury as a practice kitchen in the lead-up to the IKA Culinary Olympics in 2024.

"We launched last week when the chefs were there for the first time," says Craig Youdale, Dean of the CFWI. "This is an international competition that is global in scope, where countries have put together their top chefs to go against each other in a team event. It's an Olympic-style event that happens every four years with over 50 countries, thousands of chefs gathering to compete and cook against each other.

"As the Armoury is going to be the culinary base for Culinary Team Canada, they will come to the Armoury about three times a year to practice and get ready for the Olympics and part of their practice is creating food that the public can come and try. These chefs come from coast to coast, they fly into Toronto, make their way over to Aurora, and spend four days in the Town. They compete, they go visit local farms, and this past week they were out at King Cole Ducks visiting their farm and learning a little bit about their space. Each time they come, they get to absorb what is happening in the Aurora region, which is exciting, too."

The Armoury will be a central location for the team to practice and prepare.

Mertens, a chef professor for the CFWI, will serve as one of the team's lead coaches.

"We can not only boast about having the team gain from Chef Olaf's expertise, but two of our own amazing graduates, Vaishnav Myekar and Hannah Bowering, are competing on the team," said Mr. Youdale in a statement. "I could not be prouder to see Vish and Hannah on the world stage.

Added Myekar: "Niagara College has been the greatest experience for me in Canada. All the connections and networking I have been able to make since studying and graduating from Niagara College has been incredibly rewarding. I can't express how excited I am to be a part of the team and to be able to call Aurora Armoury the home base for the next few years for Team Canada's practice."

This enthusiasm was also shared by Bowering.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work alongside and learn from such an incredible group of chefs," she said. "I am so excited to see where this experience takes me in my career and I am honoured to support Team Canada in their journey to go for the gold."

In the lead-up to the IKA Culinary Olympics there will be many more opportunities to not only see the team in action in the local kitchen, but also sample what they have prepared.

Last weekend, the team was in the kitchen cooking pizzas and decorating cupcakes "just for fun", the spoils of which were shared with families and kids visiting Town Park, says Youdale.

?It was a fun fundraiser for the team and people got to see what they were doing,? he says. ?That is the kind of thing we look forward to so people can get exposed to some of the best chefs in the country. It is amazing they have a space like the Armoury to come and work out of. When we started this project, those are the things we talked a lot about, of bringing exposure to the Town, bringing some really interesting opportunities for the Town to be engaged in, and this is a great example of that.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter