

Fair-trade milestone marked with chocolate

BY AARON EPP

Fair-trade advocates in Brandon are hoping chocolatey treats will get community members thinking about how their food is produced.

Three local restaurants — Chez Angela Bakery and Café, the Dock on Princess and Lady of the Lake — are offering unique fair-trade chocolate desserts throughout October to mark Fair Trade Month and celebrate Brandon's 10th anniversary as a Fair Trade Town.

The city's fair-trade committee is organizing the initiative, dubbed Fair Trade Treat Month.

"Because Brandon is a Fair Trade Town, we thought it would be a good idea to do something to promote it and make people aware of it, but also to have some fun," said Zack Gross, president of the Marquis Project, a non-profit dedicated to international development that is part of the initiative.

The public is invited to visit the participating restaurants and order the desserts, which are made using fair-trade chocolate donated by Camino. Customers who purchase a dessert will be entered into a draw to win a prize pack consisting of fair-trade products.

Fair trade is a movement that ensures producers in developing countries receive fair wages, work under safe conditions and engage in environmentally sustainable practices.

Participating in Fair Trade Treat Month is a natural fit for Jeff and Angela Chambers, general manager and chef de cuisine, respectively, at Chez Angela.

When the couple started dating in high school, they took an environmental studies class in which they learned about where food is produced and the impact of the supply chain on both the environment and farmers.

The couple prides themselves on offering from-scratch baking made with ingredients that are ethically sourced.

"It's something we've talked about for literally 35 years," James said.

The restaurant is offering a 10-layer chocolate cake that incorporates milk chocolate and dark chocolate.

"It's just a great way to get the customers we already have and new customers in the community thinking about fair trade initiatives," James said.

Lady of the Lake co-owner Kaleigh Stobbe agrees. She says the



Angie and James Chambers of Chez Angela Bakery and Café show their gluten-free 10-layer chocolate cake on Tuesday. The cake is Chez Angela's fair-trade creation for Fair Trade Treat Month. Lady of the Lake and The Dock on Princess also are participating in the initiative. (Tim Smith/The Brandon Sun)

café has taken a "think globally, act locally" approach ever since her parents started it in 1996. The café sources local, organic food whenever possible.

"Being from small-town Manitoba, we strive to support (local businesses) through our purchasing at the store and the café," Stobbe said.

"We believe in social justice, especially for farmers. This is kind of reaching farther into the Global South, but in general, we do support as many local businesses as possible ... to keep the money local."

Throughout October, Lady of the Lake is offering the Camino Chocolate Tart, which is served with a salted caramel sauce or a red wine berry fruit sauce.

"This just seemed like a perfect

opportunity to show people how to celebrate ethical consumerism and delicious dessert making and eating," Stobbe said.

The Dock on Princess is offering its spin on Black Forest cake, which includes a milk chocolate mousse and dark chocolate glaze.

"I'm just really excited to have a lot of fair-trade chocolate in because it's delicious," said Whitney Glasgow, executive chef. "I know any of these desserts will be top notch."

Fairtrade Canada awards the Fair Trade Town designation to communities that meet five requirements: a steering committee composed of volunteers and civic leaders that meets regularly; fair trade-certified product availability throughout the town; public awareness events;

community support from local businesses and other partners; and political support from the municipal authority.

Brandon received the designation, which is renewed annually, in May 2014.

Its fair-trade committee "was on a bit of a hiatus during the (COVID-19) pandemic," according to Lindsay Hargreaves, environmental initiatives co-ordinator for the City of Brandon.

Fair Trade Treat Month is an opportunity to bring the committee back to life, Hargreaves said.

"My hope is just to celebrate and bring awareness to others in the community who might not know what fair trade is, and just indulge in some tasty treats."

Janice Hamilton, executive di-

rector of the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation, is pleased to see fair trade being promoted in Brandon. Buying fair trade is a way people can use their consumer habits to make a difference in the lives of people in other countries, she says.

"When we choose fair-trade products, we're standing against poverty in the Global South and yet it isn't a handout," Hamilton said. "Fair-trade products are noted for being high quality; they're produced in ways that respect human dignity and the health of our planet."

Fairtrade Canada launched the Fair Trade Towns program in 2006. Sixteen communities currently carry the designation, including Winnipeg and Selkirk.

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