



Southwest Florida Chefs Host Dinner at the Acclaimed James Beard House

FORT MYERS, Fla. (August 6, 2015) – Southwest Florida’s culinary treasures – both the foods grown here and the chefs who prepare them – will play starring roles at a dinner at the prestigious James Beard House this fall.

Norman Love, the acclaimed chocolatier, pastry chef and founder of Norman Love Confections, has put together an all-star team of local chefs who will present the six-course dinner in New York on Friday, Oct. 2.

Joining him will be Fabrizio Aielli, chef/owner of Sea Salt in Naples and St. Petersburg; Harold Balink, chef/owner of Cru in Fort Myers; George Fistrovich, executive chef of The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples; and Todd Johnson, chef/owner of Rumrunners in Cape Coral. Ryan Love, an up-and-coming pastry chef at Norman Love Confections, will join his father to create the desserts.

“The menu will feature ingredients that are indigenous to Southwest Florida,” said Norman Love. “The other team members are longtime friends and accomplished chefs. Everyone is really excited about working together on this project.”

Also playing a starring role in the meal will be the produce and meats of Rosy Tomorrows Heritage Farm, run by Rose O’Dell King of North Fort Myers. Her chicken, red wattle pork, Everglades tomatoes and mint marigold will be among the ingredients the chefs use to craft their hors d’oeuvres and six courses.

Chef Todd Johnson, who helms the third course, has a clear vision of what he’ll be making. “I’ll do a succulent miso belly as the first element,” Johnson said, “a second of mint marigold saltimbocca tenderloin and a third of pig shoulder confit with butternut squash. All will be on one plate.” It will be paired with a 2011 Evenstad Reserve Domaine Serene Pinot Noir.

For his pre-dinner canapé, he plans a savory sesame cone topped with red wattle pork rilletes and mascarpone mousse.

“I’m really excited to work with this group of chefs,” Johnson said. “It’s a true veteran chefs’ crew.”

Balink’s starter will be Rosy Tomorrows chicken pate and port gelee. He has the honor of the first main plated course, which is pan-seared black grouper, Rosy Tomorrows Everglades tomatoes, crispy oyster and conch-orange butter. It will be paired with a 2013 Mauritson Sauvignon Blanc.

Aielli will serve a savory Murray River Salt macaroon with Florida spiny lobster and foie gras as his hors d'oeuvre. His plated second course will consist of Pine Island octopus ink ravioli stuffed with free ranged chicken, white truffle, homemade ricotta, Venus clam ragu and liquid egg yolk. It will be paired with a 2012 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay.

Florida red shrimp spaghetti with red lettuce puree and Sarasota Mote sturgeon caviar is Fistrovich's contribution to the hors d'oeuvres. He will handle the fourth course of Jackman Ranch beef cheeks, barbecued hearts of palm, charred corn cloud in the flavors of esquite (a Northern Mexican dish), boniato and preserved chop box cabbage leaves, paired with a 2011 Cal White Toro Tempranillo.

The Loves will create a pre-dessert of chilled Florida strawberry consommé, crème fraiche panna cotta and lemon basil macaron glace, paying homage to the fruits of Florida while keeping it "light and refreshing," Love said. "Then it will be all about chocolate for dessert."

The final course is something intriguing and mysterious called the Bittersweet Chocolate and Tropical Experience, which Norman and Ryan Love will team up to create. They will serve it with a Ornellaia Le Serre Nuove 2012 Bolgheri.

The not-for-profit James Beard Foundation maintains the Greenwich Village property that was home to the famed cookbook author and educator. Today, the house hosts culinary events showcasing chefs from around the world vying to create a meal for 80 people in this challenging performance space. The foundation's mission is to "celebrate, nurture and honor America's culinary heritage."

With a limit of 80 diners, most people won't be able to attend the dinner in New York, but the chefs are considering re-creating the meal locally afterward, most likely as a fundraiser for a local charity. They will be able to show video of the New York dinner at the event for an added taste of the real thing.

Tickets for the Beard dinner are expected to go on sale Aug. 1. Details and reservations are available at jamesbeard.org.

Norman Love Confections has Chocolate Salons in Fort Myers, Estero and Naples in Southwest Florida. The chocolatier creates and distributes handcrafted artisanal chocolates from its Fort Myers corporate headquarters that encompasses both production and retail operations. Chocolates, gift baskets, sipping chocolate and Love's new book, "Artistry in Chocolate, A Story of Love," can be ordered online at www.normanloveconfections.com. In addition, Norman Love Confections chocolates and desserts are offered on 18 Princess Cruises' ships through the "Chocolate Journeys" partnership.

The award-winning Fort Myers-based chocolatier has been lauded more than a dozen times by a leading consumer ratings magazine, including recognition six times for producing the best ultra-premium chocolates in the nation. Forbes.com included Norman Love Confections

BLACK line on its list of the nation's top 10 truffles; The Huffington Post listed it among the six best U.S. destinations in its Chocolate Lover's Travel Guide; and USA Today named Love as one of its top 10 entrepreneurs for 2014.

Love and his wife, Mary, founded the business in 2001 and contribute to more than 250 charitable causes every year.

About the James Beard Foundation (JBF)

Founded in 1986, the James Beard Foundation celebrates, nurtures, and honors America's diverse culinary heritage through programs that educate and inspire. A cookbook author and teacher with an encyclopedic knowledge about food, James Beard, who died in 1985, was a champion of American cuisine. He helped educate and mentor generations of professional chefs and food enthusiasts, instilling in them the value of wholesome, healthful, and delicious food. Today JBF continues in the same spirit by administering a number of diverse programs that include educational initiatives, food industry awards, scholarships for culinary students, publications, chef advocacy training, and thought-leader convening. The Foundation also maintains the historic James Beard House in New York City's Greenwich Village as a "performance space" for visiting chefs. In September of 2012, JBF launched the Diplomatic Culinary Partnership with the U.S. Department of State's Office of Protocol and helped create the American Chef Corps as a way to champion American chefs abroad, promote American food products, and foster an interest in American culinary culture and history through international programs and initiatives. One such project is the next World's Fair, Expo Milano 2015, for which the James Beard Foundation is co-leading the effort for the State Department to design and produce the USA Pavilion, a global gathering of 147 countries addressing the challenges of how we will feed ourselves in the future. The Pavilion, whose theme will be "American Food 2.0: United to Feed the Planet," will showcase America's contributions to global food security and gastronomy. For more information, please visit jamesbeard.org. Find insights on food at the James Beard Foundation's blog [Delights & Prejudices](#). Join the James Beard Foundation on [Facebook](#). Follow the James Beard Foundation on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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