

Recipe for 'spaghetti with community sauce'

BY MARGARET DELLA SANTINA

Ruch Community K-8 School celebrated its annual Fall Festival on October 26 in many of the usual ways. School-made scarecrows hung from trees and lounged in lawn chairs in the warm autumn sunshine. Princesses, elves, and bats roamed the halls. The book fair drew a steady stream of excited young customers snapping up *Legends of Chima* or *Origami Yoda*. Middle school students helped younger ones toss frogs onto lily pads and aim footballs at holes in a board. And spaghetti was served in the cafeteria.

At first glance, it looked like ordinary spaghetti with tomato sauce. But the long list of "ingredients" that actually went into that sauce might surprise you—and demonstrates that Ruch School is, indeed, Ruch *Community* School.

Here is how Ruch Community School made "spaghetti with community sauce": In spring 2013, the Fleming family cleared a site for the new Ruch School garden and laid down gravel. Jeff Vinyard led construction of the garden fence and beds; with the help of Mark Prchal and some discounted local lumber from Tommy Maddox, the garden was finished in time for a late spring planting.

Next, Roarke Ball of Roarke's



Dawn Mena serving "spaghetti with community sauce."

Earthworks donated ten yards of homemade Applegate Valley soil mix, into which were planted tomato, pepper and eggplant starts donated by Barb Wallgren of Cowboy Flowers, and basil and thyme donated by Matt and Donna Epstein. Rob Underwood donated harvest-shipment crates, which were used for additional planting beds, and Crater Sand and Gravel provided more soil at a discounted rate. The garden received a 100-foot hose from Tiffany Ryan of Ryan's Outpost and lots of homemade compost from Gary Fowler.

The garden became a place where Ruch students connected their academic learning to the local environment, putting "place-based learning" into action. Using



Community member Jeff Vinyard helped students with garden construction.

math skills and art concepts, students helped design the garden. Math and engineering skills also came into play as students helped with the construction project. Environmental science entered the picture as students conducted soil and water testing, and set up a composting system. Planting the garden, students learned about horticulture and plant identification. As spring turned to summer, students watered, weeded and mulched the garden.

During the summer, Erin Volheim, of Wilding Rural Education Center and the local Grange, guided the garden project from its inception to first harvest. She tended and harvested tomatoes, peppers,

and basil; she cooked and froze marinara sauce along the way. When students returned to school in fall, they continued to harvest tomatoes, basil, and peppers.

As Fall Festival approached, Dawn Mena jumped into action, planning the menu and cooking up an additional batch of sauce with beef donated by Peter Salant.

"Spaghetti's ready!" came the announcement at about 5 pm during the Fall Festival. Robots, Crayola crayons, and "plainclothes" community members who lined up for spaghetti in the school cafeteria were greeted by a smiling ladybug (aka Jill Vargas) and served by friendly Dawn and Hector Mena. Bread donated by Rise Up! Bakery rounded out the menu.

This was no ordinary spaghetti with sauce; this was spaghetti with *community* sauce. Families, friends, pirates and princes were smiling as they left the school that evening.

Principal Julie Hill and community coordinator Michelle Hensman were smiling, too, as they drove out of the parking lot: this community sauce represented their hard work and commitment to the vision of Ruch Community K-8 School as a place where learning is linked to the local environment, and the community is part of the school.

Yum. Spaghetti never tasted so good!

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Local bread puddings elicit oohs and ahs

BY J.D. ROGERS, MIKELL NIELSEN AND BARBARA HOLIDAY

Ah, what to do on a beautiful fall afternoon we asked ourselves. When sampling warm bread pudding was suggested, *yesses* burst from our lips like volcanoes of whipped cream. It doesn't take much to entertain this trio of tasters, so off we went. The "we" being J.D. Rogers, Mikell Nielsen and Barbara Holiday—all serious bread pudding aficionados.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines bread pudding as "a dessert consisting of slices of bread baked together with dried fruit, sugar, spices, eggs and milk." Once known as a "poor man's pudding," bread pudding originated in Rome in the early 11th century when cooks concocted a way to use leftover bread. Today, bread pudding has become an "everyman's pudding" with variations of ingredients and creativity and can be found on the menus of pubs, taverns and fine dining restaurants around the world (www.dailygazette.com).

Rogue River Lodge. Our first stop was just past Shady Cove on Highway 62 in Trail. J.D. said he hasn't been to this lodge since the days of Clarke Gable, whose most famous movie line was "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." (Later that day, J.D. claimed that he's not really old enough to have been at the lodge when Gable actually had graced the premises, but we're not sure.)

When our Lodge Bread Pudding arrived, our taste buds were already salivating. "Hurry, Mikell, get a picture of this lovely presentation!" J.D. urged. What a pleasure that first bite was—white chocolate and dried cherries in rich,

buttery, fluffy bread pudding covered with a fantastic whiskey-caramel sauce and accompanied by tasty vanilla ice cream. (Not incidentally, croissants are used in place of bread.)

While sipping excellent coffee, J.D. used the Indiana-style of counting—"one, three"—between bites, "each better than the last one," he drooled. Too soon the bread pudding and the accompanying vanilla bean ice cream were sweet memories.

4 Daughters Irish Pub. Not to worry, though, we were on our way to 4 Daughters at 126 West Main Street in Medford. J.D. remembered when this place was the Union, a rock-and-roll club from the last days of great rock music.

But the arrival of our Pear Bread Pudding brought us back to the present with a strong scent of cinnamon. Caramelized pears were mixed in with this Heartland white bread pudding, which was drizzled with marionberry and whiskey-caramel sauces that we wolfed down.

The Black Sheep Pub & Restaurant. Our third stop was The Black Sheep at 51 North Main Street in Ashland, where we immediately placed our order for their Mum's Vanilla Bread Pudding topped with a rich bourbon sauce.

The presentation was lovely and simple. A crisp white plate and a fresh sprig of mint let the pudding take the show as it floated in a puddle of decadent sauce. The bread pudding was smooth and creamy and warm and gooey and rich. The subtle flavors melded together to create a more than satisfying dessert.

There is something so "feel good" about sitting in a pub with friends sharing a cup of aromatic coffee and bread pudding. It was almost as if we were in a small town in a foreign country. If we hadn't had to return to our "normal" lives, it would have been lovely to wrap our hands around another warm cup of coffee, curl up on cozy sofas and fall into a sweet, sugary coma.

After that, our stomachs advised us to call it quits. Three bread puddings were enough for these intrepid tasters in one day.

Porter's Restaurant and Bar. Porter's, at 147 North Front Street in Medford, opens at five in the evening. A couple of days later, we made sure to be among the first arrivals at our fourth and final destination.

Enjoying one of the last warm fall evenings out on the patio, we savored their Jack Daniels Bread Pudding with bourbon crème anglais and rich caramel sauce, to which they add walnuts and a hint of mint. The resulting texture is both creamy and crunchy. Adding to the pleasure is the homemade French bread used for this special dessert. And, as a bonus, we found that the bread pudding paired nicely with red wine.



The tasters enjoyed the outdoor seating at the shore of the Rogue River while feasting on the warm, creative bread pudding served at Rogue River Lodge in Trail.

Photo: Mikell Nielsen.

Our preference

It was unanimous! Our most favorite bread pudding was served at Rogue River Lodge, which puts a new take on an old recipe by adding white chocolate and cherries. But bread pudding lovers will appreciate *all* the other luscious bread puddings we sampled.

Our nine-year-old tasting helper, Carlen Nielsen, wasn't much for bread pudding, but the chocolate cakes at these restaurants earned "delish" and "yummy" ratings from her. Carlen also gave high marks to her new friend Scooter, the "so cute" adopted stray cat at Rogue River Lodge. Fortunately, Scooter kept Carlen thoroughly entertained while odd and profuse oohing sounds arose from the "adult" tasters.

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