

# Flavors of MEXICO

## Lunch, dinners feature Mexican chef

By **HEATHER DOUGLAS**  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

**B**aked Alaska Executive Chef Chris Holen hosted a pay-what-you-can luncheon that served 140 diners in three hours and raised \$1,400 for United Way of Clatsop County earlier this summer on Father's day. The event was hosted through Holen's global chef exchange program, Chef Outta Water, and featured a collaboration with Australian chef Michael Brine.

Holen is planning another pay-what-you-can fundraising luncheon on Wednesday, Aug. 7, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Nekst Event kitchen, just east of Baked Alaska, at 175 14th St. Suite 100 in Astoria. This time, Holen is inviting chef Sergio Mata from the Marinaterra Hotel and Spa in San Carlos Nuevo Guaymas in the state of Sonora, Mexico. The lunch will benefit the Astoria Regatta Festival and will include culinary students from Tongue Point Job Corps.

Two more dinner events with chef Mata, "Exploring Comfort Foods of Mexico" at 6 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 8, and "Seafood and the Sea of Cortez" at 5 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 11, will also take place at the Nekst Event kitchen. Tickets and advance reservations are required.

### An invitation to collaborate

Holen and his business partner Simon Millcock founded Chef Outta Water in 2016. Since then, the outreach organization has connected global culinary exchanges all over the world.

Holen met chef Mata during a trip to Mexico when he spoke at the "70th Annual Pacific Fisheries Technologists Meeting" in February and dined at Mata's restaurant. Holen was impressed when Mata, who is executive chef, invited him back into the kitchen.

"He took the time out of his busy day to connect with me; I knew right away that he was someone I wanted to collaborate with," Holen said.

Holen invited Mata to Astoria. It just so happened that August worked the best, and Holen decided to tie the event into the Astoria Regatta festivities. "All proceeds from the lunch will benefit the Astoria Regatta Scholarship Fund," Holen said.

Chef Mata, via email, translated from Spanish, said he is excited to bring the flavors of Mexico to Astoria. His connection with the Chef Outta Water program have helped him a lot "to become motivated as a person and a chef to be able to represent my region. He also said "it will be an amazing professional experience that will hopefully open me up to new career opportunities."

### Local and global collaboration

Holen, who enjoys, "continual education and outreach," seeks local connections just as much as global opportunities.



**Chefs Chris Holen and Sergio Mata make ceviche together in Mexico.**

Baked Alaska has served as a work-based learning site for Tongue Point Job Corps Culinary Program students, and in 2018 received the Community Supporter of the Year award.

Katrina Gasser, Business and Community Liaison at Tongue Point Job Corps said "Chef Holen and his team at Baked Alaska and Chef Outta Water stand out as excellent community partners for so many reasons."

Holen emphasized the importance of giving Tongue Point students a "real world activity," and said "the students are usually very shy at the beginning of the lunch and typically by the end they are interacting with the community and high fiving each other."

One Tongue Point culinary student who gained permanent employment from working at Baked Alaska – Martien Chisholm – will be working the event with chefs Holen and Mata.

### Mexican-themed lunch

Although the pay-what-you-can model is unique, Holen ensures that the system is effective.

"Anyone and everyone can come to it regardless of their ability to pay; there are no prices. However, we try not to say 'pay what you want,' but rather 'pay what you can,'" Holen said. "100 percent of the proceeds go to charity and besides that it really brings together a community of people, including those who normally can't afford to come out to eat."

Each luncheon has a theme, and this one will be "Mexican Street Food." Holen likes the casual and comforting nature of serving what people would eat on an average day in Mata's region of Sonora, Mexico. The event will have an unpretentious feel, with diners stepping up to order, paying what they can and sitting within the community style seating waiting for their food to be cooked.

Holen enjoys seeing diverse groups enjoy the sense of place that food creates.

"We have had some of the homeless community come out and eat; one guy walked up and said 'I only have 50 cents,' so I said 'it's 50 cents then, no worries.'"

### If You Go

#### Pay What You Can Pop-Up Lunch

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 7

Nekst Event, 175 14th St. Suite 100, Astoria

Details: Pay what you can. Proceeds go to Astoria Regatta Scholarship Fund.

#### Exploring Comfort Foods of Mexico

6 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 8

Nekst Event, 175 14th St. Suite 100, Astoria

Details: \$40. Reservations required at [bit.ly/30VD3Ss](http://bit.ly/30VD3Ss). Casual buffet style family dinner with chef Mata.

#### Seafood and the Sea of Cortez

5 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 11

Nekst Event, 175 14th St. Suite 100, Astoria

Details: \$60. Reservations required at [bit.ly/2ZfEJ8X](http://bit.ly/2ZfEJ8X). Family style dinner featuring chef Mata's famous paella.