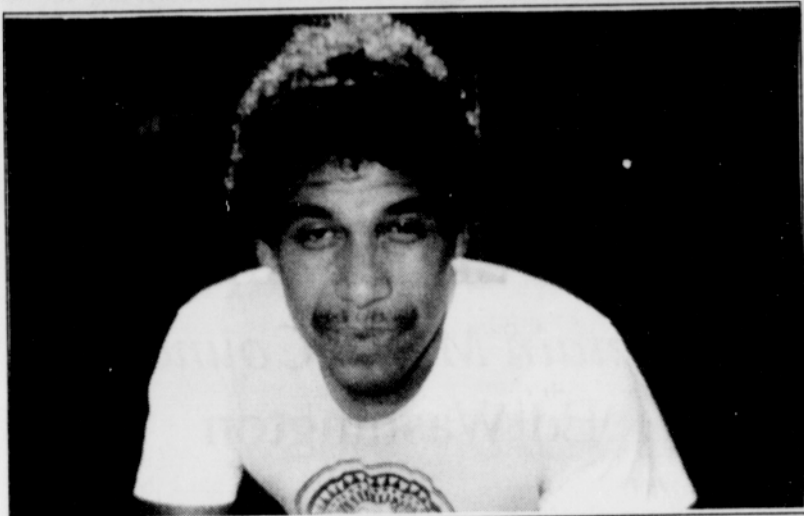


Bridging St. Johns

The Portland Observer

St. Johns Residents Praise North Police Precinct



"Good for the community, if it wasn't here - there would be a lot of crime," **George Boswell**



Alan Orr North Precinct Commander



"The Precinct has done a lot to clean up St. Johns," **Mary Mccracken**



"Precinct - would offer more protection," **Lorriane Bachelor**

"Keeping this precinct open will make it easier for us to really get to know the people in the communities we serve," said Alan Orr, Commander of Portland's North Precinct.

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Easter Offers Consumers A Taste Of Oregon

Oregon enjoys a strong reputation for offering high-end high-value specialty food products that fill a niche market in consumerland. An upcoming holiday will give these products and some non-food items another chance to impress consumers with discriminating tastes.

Many Oregonians may not realize that the southern Oregon Coast is largely responsible for the traditional Easter lily. Curry County and the bordering county of Del Norte, California are two of the nation's leading production areas for Easter lily bulbs.

Then there are those things that are eaten this time of year.

If you purchase the more expensive Easter baskets filled with specialty confections and food products, chances are you are getting a taste of Oregon.

"It's a very busy time for us," says Michelle McCall, sales manager for Fenton and Lee, a Eugene-based company that produces chocolate candies. "We started filling Easter orders the week after Valentine's Day. There has been no rest."

"About 40% of our annual sales happen at Christmas," says Dick Fuhr, owner of the Candy Basket in Portland. "Easter is next with up to 30% of the sales, followed by Valentine's Day at 15%."

It's not just the chocolate that puts Oregon confectioners on the map. It's what goes into the chocolate, not to mention that high-quality reputation found in a number of Oregon products.

"People look to Oregon as being full of wonderful specialty food products and cottage industries," says Laura Barton, marketing specialist with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "It is both a reputation and an image that we have. Holidays are always an occasion to show off what the state has to offer."

Oregon companies are not only producing the standard chocolate Easter bunnies or eggs, but this year's Easter baskets may also contain local items that

will please the palate of those who don't like chocolate.

"We have companies that are producing wonderful little packages of dried cranberries and dried cherries," says Barton. "Some of the meat snacks like dried jerkies are nicely packaged and go great in an Easter basket. We have a cookie company whose ovens are busy right now baking rich, buttery shortbread in the shape of bunnies, tulips, and Easter eggs."

Oregon also supplies many of those special confectionery ingredients to companies inside and outside its borders.

"Fruit creams are one example," says Barton. "Our great production of berries and other fruits are used by chocolate makers around the country."

But it is the candy makers in Oregon that sing the highest praise for the local ingredients.

"We use Oregon products as much as possible -- local fruits, nuts, and dairy products," says Fuhr. "We would be remiss if we didn't use the tremendous resources that Oregon has to offer."

Oregon leads the nation in the production of marionberries. The Candy Basket developed a marionberry cream for its soft center chocolates six years ago. Today it ranks as its top selling soft center cream. Oregon leads the nation in the production of hazelnuts. Fuhr says the gift shop at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. offers a "Taste of Oregon" chocolate bar that features finely chopped Oregon hazelnuts. The reputation of Oregon products for confections has spread.

"Most of our business is out of state," says Fenton and Lee's McCall. "Many of our products end up in the upscale department stores on the east coast. We have a fruit and nut egg featuring Oregon hazelnuts and locally dried fruits. We also offer a strawberry chocolate that uses fruit powder from Oregon Freeze Dried which produces pink Easter bunnies that taste like strawberries."

What's new this year? Ten dollars

will buy you a chocolate egg with six chocolate bunnies inside. For fans of Jurassic Park, how about a chocolate egg filled with little chocolate baby dinosaurs? For adults, chocolate covered espresso beans are popular. Sugar free chocolate items are more in demand these days.

Even the makeup of the Easter basket itself is changing.

"We see a trend of people being discriminating in their tastes to the point of customizing their own Easter baskets," says Fuhr. "Family members are not only putting in confections, but local fruits, syrups, whatever."

Most Oregon produced Easter offerings aren't the types of baskets or candies normally found in a local discount or grocery store and are traditionally handed out to children. Oregon items tend to be more expensive, a bit more special.

"We do have confectioners that produce small items that are 15 to 20 cents apiece," says Barton. "But most of them are going to be more like a dollar item such as a chocolate truffle."

"We are in the fine confection industry," adds Fuhr. "We make a product that is very special or a reward for someone."

And the relatively high price someone pays for Oregon specialty products is a reward for those who turn the products out, adding value to Oregon's economy.

For more information, contact Laura Barton at 229-6734 or Bruce Pokamey at 378-3773.

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