

Get out of your holiday turkey rut with Aurora's Culinary Travellers



By Brock Weir

If you're getting tired of the same old turkey or ham for Christmas dinner, why not join Aurora's Culinary Travellers on their adventure.

Participants in the Aurora Public Library's inaugural Culinary Traveller program have compiled their very best home-tested recipes from all around the world for your eating pleasure.

The Culinary Traveller Cookbook, published online this fall by the Aurora Public Library, brings together some cherished culinary traditions from many of the diverse international communities represented in Aurora today.

Participants in the program gathered each week at the York Region Food Network's Community Kitchen on Industrial Parkway armed with recipes and a spirit of fellowship which transcended any language barriers that might have been in the way.

"I wanted to learn more about different cuisines, but I learned it is much more than just learning about a recipe, it is learning about the culture, learning about the people, and a lot more about the human and social experiences," says Royden D'Souza, who came to the program with an Indian recipe for biryani tucked under his arm. "But it all starts with the cuisine. You're learning to make a different type of food, but while you're learning about the food, you also learn about the history and the background of the food.

"French Onion Soup, for example, sounds like a very trendy soup to have in a restaurant, but when my [fellow Culinary Traveller] was making the soup, she explained its history and it turned out it was originally a peasant soup because the peasants didn't have anything but a few onions leftover. Nowadays, you can get really fancy by putting in brandy, cognac and all sorts of fancy things." The Culinary Traveller Program is a spin-off of the Aurora Public Library's Women's Meet-Up group, which convenes every second Tuesday. The Library regularly asks participants to provide feedback on their programs and one such note said they simply wanted to learn more about making healthy meals.

This spurred a grander vision for the Library's Lucy Frechette and Claudia Olguin, Coordinator of Community-Led Initiatives for the Aurora Public Library. Working with David Lightfoot of the York Region Food Network, they devised a program that was tailored to be fully inclusive, engaging Aurorans of all demographics.

"We wanted something that would make residents more engaged in the community, get to know their neighbours and make new friends," says Ms. Olguin. "We also wanted a program where language wouldn't be a barrier."

Asking each participant to bring in recipes from their respective regions, one to be cooked each month, she says they also wanted Travellers to leave with something "tangible" – thus, the idea for the Culinary Traveller Cookbook.

"I was told of the program and I thought it would be nice to do something in a community setting," says Shawna Di Poce. "I have taken courses at George Brown College and I thought it would be nice to do something in a community setting as opposed to school. I thought I would learn something new, different recipes from around the world and do something together that is just enjoyable and friendly while learning something about each other – and I liked the idea of sitting down and having a meal with people, too."

Ms. Di Poce learned the ins and outs of Italian cooking from her mother-in-law, something she was eager to share with the class. While the online cookbook is available now, classes for the next Culinary Traveller program resume January 4, with registration

taken individually for each month's session online at www.aurorapl.ca.

?We want more people to join so we can continue running the program and have more people come, get more recipes,? says Claudia. ?Everyone is welcome to come. We're going to be featuring Canadian food next year. Some people got together and said they wanted to help facilitate the sessions, so instead of creating one recipe, they bring a whole menu. We are asking people to come and share their recipes with us, meet new people, make new friends where language is not a barrier.?

To download the Cookbook, visit aurorapl.ca/content/newcomers and click on the book cover.