

Meet your Iron Chefs: Thay Siharath



Thay Siharath's story is undoubtedly one which many with a bent towards the culinary arts can relate to ? being enticed by some nice home cooking and getting the proverbial wrist slap when trying to grab a quick and sneaky taste when mom wasn't looking.

But regulars of Aurora's Orchid Thai restaurant might breathe the occasional sigh of relief that Mr. Siharath took his upbringing among the thick and pleasant aromas and full bodied flavour Thailand has to offer to the next level in sharing it with the masses.

?I don't remember when I knew I wanted to do this for a living, but I discovered my love of cooking around the age of 12,? he says. ?When my mom was cooking, I would always go into the kitchen and get into trouble taking her food, but I guess I realised I could be a chef when I was in my late teens because people used to tell me, ?Hey, your food is not bad. You should open a restaurant.'?

Evidently it was sage advice. Mr. Siharath arrived in Canada with his family in 1979 at the age of 11. He eventually took over what is now Orchid Thai about 10 years ago. At the time, Thai was one of the more exotic international foods gaining popularity on the international stage and he thought with many people in Aurora, often heading down to Toronto for new, more interesting, and more creative ways to tickle their palates, would embrace the authentic flavours he had to offer.

A decade on, this theory has proven correct.

Mr. Siharath will put his skills to the test against four other local chefs this April 18 as the Aurora Community Centre (ACC) is transformed into ?Kitchen Stadium? for the first Iron Chef Aurora competition. Iron Chef Aurora, and the three day Taste of Aurora festival at the ACC that will follow, is the brainchild of Debbie McGrath and Tim Newnham of the Aurora-based Habachat, a social media company.

The duo thought with events like Ribfest showcasing out-of-town restaurants, something was needed to put the spotlight on what local chefs and restaurants have to offer. Paired with many community-based charities and organizations, it was also a good way to raise money for worthy causes that serve the community.

Mr. Siharath and Orchid Thai are teamed up with Yellow Brick House in this competition to raise money for the local shelter. The restaurant chose Yellow Brick House, having been involved in many fundraisers over the years ? including donating two round-trip tickets to Bangkok at one event.

They are happy to be paired up again and tickets for the April 18 event and subsequent festival are available at both locations.

Chefs hoping to be victorious have already met a few times to go over the plan for the evening, but are keeping their game plans fully under wraps. All five chefs will be tasked with showcasing their talent through some of their favourite dishes incorporating the

same two secret ingredients.

Mr. Siharath has a particular penchant for the aromatic curries that dominate parts of Thai cuisine and experimenting last week, he was sceptical about how to incorporate one particular ingredient into a favourite dish, but was very happy with the result. Tasked with creating enough food for the hundreds of people they hope to draw to Iron Chef, he estimates he will need a further four people to help him pull off his vision.

?My mom is a great cook, so when I was a little boy, I always enjoyed her food and hoped one day I could cook the same,? he recalls. ?I knew every Sunday she always made a feast. It always changed, but regardless of what she cooked, it was good. It was traditional Thai cooking so with the curries, the herbs, and her lemon prawn soup, with the aromas you always knew it was Sunday and that was really inspiring.?

This inspiration is something that he hopes to pass on not only throughout the wider community, but also to his two sons. The elder has developed a similar appreciation for the food his dad has to offer, but his brother?

?The little guy we're trying to break in very slowly!?

For more information on either Iron Chef Aurora, or Taste of Aurora, visit www.habachat.com/ironchef.