

One big 'cheat day' will make a difference in women's lives



By Brock Weir

People the world-over have come to appreciate the occasional indulgence in chocolate.

Around this time of year, however, when Valentine's Day is just around the corner, it is an indulgence that is all too hard to avoid.

For Aurora fitness guru Jennifer Ettinger, everything is about moderation - even if she encourages women to have one really big 'cheat day' on their diets later this month.

For the fifth year running, Ms. Ettinger, who has devoted her career to the empowerment of women through her company, Fit Your Style, is heading up Women, Wine and Chocolate, a fundraiser bringing together two of the great indulgences in an evening to benefit the Women's Centre of York Region.

This year's event, which is open for the first time this year to men as well, will be held Thursday, February 27 at Cardinal Golf and Country Club in King. It will include food samples, a wine garden, fashion show, photo booth, jewellery and much more all for a good cause.

'I have relapsed over the years with how I wanted this to develop,' says Ms. Ettinger with a laugh. 'Initially when I created this for the Women's Centre of York Region, we only had healthy dark chocolate and red wine and all the food was really, really healthy because I am all about wellness.'

'This year, I decided, what the heck, we're going to call this 'Your Ultimate Cheat Day'. We're really working on allowing it to open up to a bigger market. We're appealing to everyone out there with their different palates and that is why I am comfortable getting around that with an ultimate cheat day!'

Ms. Ettinger, a dual citizen of Canada and the United States, originally got involved with the Women, Wine and Chocolate concept south of the border, volunteering for a women's resource centre in Michigan. After holding a similar event there, moving back to Canada six years ago she connected with the Women's Centre of York Region to hold an event for them.

Her interest in issues most effecting women is a very personal one. After being sidelined with chronic fatigue syndrome and gaining

weight, she has been driven to help women get fit in a way that really fits who they are, regardless of preconceived ideals or airbrushed images far removed from reality.

In sitting down to chart out her planning for this fifth event, however, she finally realised the root of this drive.

‘I realised that when I strip everything down, I am doing this to honour my mom,’ she says. ‘She gave up so much, she worked so hard, and she really represents someone who could have benefitted from the Women's Centre of York Region. She represents empowerment and strength to me and is pretty much my hero.

‘She has allowed me to go after my own dreams and is the typical mom that if you needed the shirt off her back she would give it to you in two seconds without even a hesitation. She is my pillar of strength now when I am clear about why I do this.’

The result is a Women, Wine and Chocolate event she promises will be bigger and better than ever. Over the past four years, the event has raised nearly \$45,000 for the Centre and this year they hope to add \$15,000 more to their tally.

On hand to help them bring in the dollars will be Richmond Hill-based jewellery designer Mark Lash, whose handiwork was recently seen on Bruno Mars at both the Grammy Awards and the Super Bowl, who has designed a one-of-a-kind diamond necklace which will be auctioned off during the evening, a candy buffet bar, astrological readings, demonstrations by TV chefs, and a smorgasbord of food and chocolate from vendors across York Region.

And for ladies ‘and some gentlemen’ on the fence about shelling out \$50 for a ticket, not only will firefighters from the Central York Fire Services be available for photo ops, but chocolate will be served on silver platters carried by male models Ms. Ettinger has worked with through the fitness industry.

‘I giggled because this is really against my norm in having sweets other than dark chocolate, but I thought, well, I live my life through moderation,’ she says. ‘I love my beer and nacho cheat day and that is how I strive to teach my clients. I am loving the fact we do have organic for those who aspire to have organic chocolate and treats. If you are vegan, we will have something to serve you. If you are traditional, let's just enjoy the night!

‘At the end of the day, I want people to know they are actually making a difference in somebody's life. Sometimes when we're involved in events like this, we get caught up in the event itself, the fun of the event, the vendors of the event. Sometimes they fail to realise that very purchase they make from the night, from a ticket to a raffle item, it is really changing the lives of a woman in this community and her children.’

For more on the fifth annual Women, Wine and Chocolate event, including tickets, visit www.womenwineandchocolate.ca.