

ChanyCakes Featured at Food Fight Cupcake Competition



by Eric
Tripoli

We are in the midst of a culinary renaissance and from coast to coast, the latest muse of confectioners is the cupcake. Gone are the days of a simple, moist chocolate cake crowned with a sweet, creamy spiral of vanilla frosting, occasionally adorned with a smattering of rainbow-colored sprinkles. The cupcakes of today are baked, stuffed, topped, torched, and the possibilities of this new frosted frontier are limited only by the imaginations of the scientists of the saccharine. From birthday parties to boutique bakeries, the purveyors of this cupcake craze have eschewed traditional two-flavor combinations in order to tempt our palettes with complex treats that represent the latest in dessert innovation.

Cupcake mania hit Providence this weekend as the first Rhode Island Food Fight event was held at the Spot Underground on Elbow Street. The sell-out crowd savored scores of surprising flavors: cinnamon roll, ice cream sundae, Thin Mint, and banana Nutella to name a few. Contestants unveiled their delectable delights for a panel of judges comprised of prominent Rhode Island foodies. David Dadekian, food critic and photographer who runs eatdrinkri.com, was thrilled to be asked to judge the contest. "Rhode Island has a great food culture. I was excited to see the inventiveness of the Rhode Island cupcake scene," he said.



Chantal Allen (left) and her boyfriend Christopher Smith (right) at the RI Food Fight Cupcake Championship.

Jim Nellis and Casey Spencer were responsible for the creation and organization of the entire event. The duo started Rhode Island Food Fight in order to promote fun and friendly competition for local restaurants and to provide these small businesses with more exposure. They plan on holding monthly contests all over Rhode Island, each focusing on a different aspect of the local food culture. "On the horizon right now, we have plans to have contests for best pizza, salsa, and food trucks," Nellis said. Both he and Spencer were satisfied at the turnout and the flow of the event. "I'm happy that everyone here was happy and people got to eat some wonderful cupcakes," she said.

The competition attracted over a dozen South Coast bakers, some well-established, some yet-to-be-known. One of those up-and-coming cupcake alchemists was Westport's very own ChanyCakes. Started in July 2011 by 21 year-old Chantal Allen, ChanyCakes is based out of her home. The Bristol Community College student, who will be receiving her Associates in Fine Arts this semester, began baking as a hobby when she was 18. She impressed her friends and family so much, they began dropping hints that she should take it a step further. "So many people said I should start a business, so I took their advice, and it began to work out," she said. When she decided

to have a go at starting a cupcake shop, she went back to the basics first. “I started simple, making plain chocolate and vanilla cupcakes, working on frosting recipes,” she said. “It wasn’t until I officially started ChanyCakes that I really started playing with all the crazy flavors.”



A little boy tries to decide which ChanyCake to choose at the RI Food Fight Cupcake Championship.

Crazy is an understatement. She lists no less than 16 flavors on the ChanyCakes Facebook page, including red velvet, pumpkin spice, and banana chocolate. “My most popular cupcakes are probably chocolate peanut butter, cookies and cream, and lemon,” she said. Since she caters for any event from showers to weddings to birthdays, Allen works with her clients to customize their cupcakes. In the past, she has made cheesecake cupcakes topped with cherries and sangria cupcakes, made with a home-made wine syrup to enhance the fruit flavor of the cake. The Food Fight was her first competition and she featured three flavors: margarita, cup of joe, and pineapple bliss. “For a few weeks before the competition, I was experimenting with some new flavors. I decided on going with cup of joe and the pineapple cupcake because I had never tried them before,” she said.

Weeks before the competition, Allen was carefully planning her strategy. After all, one can’t expect to make 300 cupcakes in three days without a hiccup or two along the way. “I had a

whole binder of all of my notes and a calendar for what I had to do each day, and a check-list. Being organized helped me out a lot," she said. Despite her meticulous timeline, things didn't exactly go off without a hitch. Her panic moment came when her KitchenAid mixer broke mid-way through her process. "My grandmother had to lend me her KitchenAid so I could finish on time."

Allen takes all the trials and tribulations with a fair amount of casual confidence and a good deal of business sense. "I participated because I knew it was going to be great exposure for me and my business and I really enjoyed the overall experience," she said. Though ChanyCakes didn't place in the final voting, Allen is ready for the next contest. "I think the biggest thing I learned from this was how to improve my time management. I did a good job in general, but there were things I could fix. But now I know what it really takes to prepare for something like this and I will be even better at future events."

A New Bedford Newbie



by Eric
Tripoli

For almost six years, I called the Pioneer Valley in Western Massachusetts my home. More specifically, I lived in and around the Amherst/Northampton region while attending school. During my time there, I came to embrace the whimsical nature

of the mishmash of places and personalities that came together to create the iconic “college town” atmosphere and life style.

If you’re a visitor or a resident, you are guaranteed to see at least one thing every day you would never expect to see. For example, one day in the winter of 2009, while walking to the library, I saw a fellow student riding her bike across our snow-covered campus. She was sporting a one-foot tall mohawk, camouflage cargo pants, flip-flops, scarf, and a bikini top. She had a hula-hoop resting on each of her tattooed shoulders as she glided her bike one-handed down the path. In the scope of day-to-day life’s predictability, she was resting comfortably outside of that bell curve.

But those were the types of things that made Western Massachusetts feel like home. I lived in a world that not only welcomed and supported the unconventional, but thrived on it like nectar. Needless to say, this is not what most people would define as “the real world.” And I agree with those people.



Before all this, I grew up in a town of about 11,000 people in northeastern Connecticut, a rural, lily-white, mostly Christian place, so it took a while for me to get accustomed to being surrounded by the weird and unpredictable.

Eventually I adopted the “When in Rome...” philosophy and espoused the culture for everything it offered. From the vanilla-almond bubble tea at Souper Bowl to the fire breathers who would practice on the Amherst town green on the warmer nights of spring and summer, that world became my real world.

Then I graduated and relocation became a requirement. After days of discussion and debate with my girlfriend and our

puppy, we decided that New Bedford was going to be the next place we call home. But being the new kids in town, we don't really know what makes New Bedford home to her thousands of residents.

And that's where you, dear reader, come in.

I'm planning on writing a column about the city of New Bedford from the perspective of one who has never lived here. This is a rich place for so many reasons and I hope to begin this journey using your suggestions as my starting points. Whether it's one of the beautiful churches that line the cobblestone side streets of downtown or a delicious beverage offered by a local café, I would love to know about it. In my short time here, I've learned that New Bedford is a community in the truest sense. People love the city and they feel a strong sense of pride for the South Coast. And you make the best seafood I've ever had.

So, New Bedford, what makes this city home for you? Please leave your suggestions in the Comments section of this column. I look forward to hearing from you.

Whaling City: An Interview with Jay Burke



by Eric
Tripoli

As the city of New Bedford prepares for the fast-approaching screening of local director Jay Burke's film "Whaling City" on September 24, NewBedfordGuide.com talked with the film's writer and director, Jay Burke. Also, see our recent interview with the film's star P.J. Sosko.

New Bedford Guide (NBG): Tell me about you and your connection to the area and how you got interested in film.

Jay Burke (JB): I was born in the area, in New Bedford, and grew up in Dartmouth. I went to Dartmouth High School. I have a big family here. I went to school out in the mid-west, to Notre Dame for my undergraduate degree, and was an economics major. Then I started working in Chicago right after college. I worked out there for a couple years, then I went to Sydney, Australia where I did some consulting. I was there for almost four years. It was just a random opportunity that presented itself, you know, I was young, not tied down by anything. While I was there, I started taking night classes for screen writing. That was about 1995 or 1996. I took some still photography classes, too. It was about that point where I thought I was really interested in film-making and the process. After three and a half years, I came back to the states, working for the same company out of the Boston office. During that year, I applied to film schools. Columbia was my first choice. You do about two years of classes, but you're attached to the university for about five years. It's not intensive; you're working on screenplays, taking night classes, and working. I was working for an ad agency doing some web stuff. It was while I was at Columbia that I conceived the idea for Whaling City and wrote the first draft while I was a student there.



NBG: So this is your first big film project, officially?

JB: Yes. I worked on a bunch of student stuff while at Columbia, and one short film in Australia. But nothing that was ever intended to be really robust or audience-ready. So this is my first feature film and my first major film.

NBG: How did Whaling City begin? Why this story? Tell me about the writing and research involved

JB: At Columbia we're required to have a thesis feature script. A lot of people naturally had ideas for their feature scripts. There's a lot of diversity at Columbia. It was really important to me not to recycle the story from somewhere else. I couldn't say there was one event that led me to the story, but it was at a time I was back visiting here, I think it was Thanksgiving. I was just kind of walking the streets downtown in New Bedford, and the fog rolled in, and it just kind of hit me like, 'Wow, this place is really cinematic. There's a ton of history here and there has to be a story here that's original that I can connect to and get excited about.' Right around that time there were some earliest publicity coming out about the struggles of commercial fishing. I think it was about 1999. There was a four-part series about commercial fishing in New England in the Boston Globe. There started to be stories locally here by the Standard-Times. I started to read that stuff and realized that there were some real contemporary stories going on right under our noses right here in New Bedford. The impression I got at the time was that the fishermen didn't have much of a voice or unified

voice. I wasn't trying to be too political with it, but I thought it was a story about something real, with real conflict. So that was the seedling of the project. Why this story? I think it's because it's intrinsically connected to the area. I never really had the desire to go out to L.A. and work on big studio films or anything like that. It's the process of the filming that's more interesting to me, not the industry itself. The experiences I've had working small and independently have been a lot more rewarding than the limited occurrences I've come in contact with concerning the larger industry.



Filming in the Mariner's Home in downtown New Bedford.

NBG: How did you get funding for the project?

JB: At that time, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which historically has financed documentaries, like on PBS, started to put up money for small, independent narrative projects. I submitted for a production grant, which would serve as seed money for the film. In 2005, the Sloan administrators liked it, but I didn't win the big production grant. I got a \$10,000 screen-writing award, which to me was kind of a way to say keep developing the script. It has some promise. That's when I kicked it into gear, and instead of writing across three different screen plays, I focused on the one and really tried to get it to the point where it was ready. It was late in 2007 when the feature film production grant came from

Sloan. That was really the beginning of the production, the fact that the production was going to be real.

NBG: Was the funding exclusively through Sloan, or did you get money from other sources?

JB: Most of the funding came through Sloan. I used a good amount of my money that will end up going unaccounted for, for various things. I couldn't even begin to add up those numbers. At one point we had a good amount of interest and some moderate [outside] investment, and that was around September of 2008. If you look at the Dow at that time, that was basically when everything bottomed out, so the timing couldn't have been worse for us.

NBG: Were these investors private individuals or companies?



JB: They were private. We were working to pushing the project forward when everyone was pulling back. The Sloan administrators were eager to see the project start and they were patient with us. We were concerned that if we dragged the project out any longer that the Sloan people would feel we were wearing out their patience. So we just decided to pull the trigger. We didn't trim the script too much, didn't trim the characters too much, and in retrospect, probably set out to shoot too ambitious of a film for the budget that we had. At that point the important thing was just making that decision and not turning back from it. That's been the guiding principal since then, is just to continue to press forward no matter what the obstacles, and there were a lot of

obstacles.

NBG: What kind of obstacles?

JB: Well, I mean we were doing something fairly unconventional, in terms of shooting in the working environments of commercial fishing. A lot of the boats didn't know what their schedules would be, so in terms of scheduling a film, which can impact tons of things, like budget. We only had a certain amount of flexibility with weather and things like that. We had boats we were going to shoot on that were going to go out fishing that shuttered up and stopped fishing in short span of time we had to shoot. Other boats' schedules would change based on the weather and that would change our schedule. It's also a lot more difficult to schedule with such a large cast. Those were just some of the big production hurdles. A lot of this stuff is solved in larger productions with money, but money was something we didn't really have any flexibility with and that tends to exacerbate a lot of the problems. So you come up with creative ways how to solve those problems. One of those was the issue of the protagonist's boat. It was really about six boats that we shot on. We used different areas of different boats a la carte to construct one boat.



Congressman
Barney Franks

makes a cameo
appearance in
Whaling City.

NBG: You feature a lot of locally and nationally famous landmarks around the city, as well as a few local businesses. How did you get these people involved with the project?

JB: A lot of it was just one-on-one, meeting people and introducing the story to people. We let some people read the script. We had a few people who were lynch-pins in helping introduce us to various people, business owners and people like that. Phil Mello is the president of the New Bedford Port Society and he helped us with several locations in terms of getting permission to shoot at the Mariner's Home and such. There were people with the city of New Bedford, like the mayor's office, and the economic development council who helped introduce us to a lot of local businesses. And a lot of it was just crew members knocking on doors and making phone calls. There's something to be said for the community in terms of the level of support they provided because, for the most part, almost everybody was very cooperative. We explained we didn't have much of a budget, and it was rare for anyone to ask for a big chunk of change and not let us shoot there otherwise. People in tenement houses and businesses were all superb, accommodating, and generous. We never would have had the variety of interesting locations that we were able to get without their help.

NBG: There are a lot of local people featured in the movie, did you have any local people working on the crew?

JB: Oh yeah. The guiding principal behind most of the decisions that we made was to go local whenever we could, and we did that. I think we held really true to that. There are also a handful of local actors we brought in from a local casting call back in March of 2010. We posted ads in some of the trade publications and got about five very experienced

crew members from the greater New Bedford area to work on the project, as well as people from Middleboro, Rehoboth, and the Cape. If somebody was qualified and we thought we could work well with them, we wanted to keep it local. We used a casting company up in Boston to get some real New England actors, and we held some independent casting sessions down in New York. Some of the music, too, is by a local guy who plays in New Bedford all the time, but I haven't announced that yet.

NGB: From the beginning of the project up until today, can you think of any particular experience or instance that stands out to you that changed the way you thought about what you were doing?

JB: I think the real moment that was a totally new experience for me was when things start to gel and you see things connect in the wider context. I think that's one of the more rewarding things. It's never exactly how you originally envisioned it, but as far as I'm concerned, I enjoy that process of discovery.

A public screening of Whaling City will be shown at the Zeiterion Theater starting at 8 p.m., Saturday September 24th. Details can be found here and tickets can be purchased on the Zeiterion's website. Keep up-to-date on the film by subscribing to the Whaling City Facebook page or by visiting their website.

Whaling City Trailer

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