

## Chocolate Fantasy

By JOY JUEDES, Staff Writer

REDLANDS DAILY FACTS & SAN BERNARDINO SUN

February 3, 2010

REDLANDS - The weekend before Valentine's Day is time for the community to show some love to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands.

Chocolate Fantasy, the clubs' annual fundraiser, is Saturday evening at the Mitten Building.

"The funds do go back into all the programs we do with the kids," said P.T. McEwen, CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands.

One program in particular demand this time of year is homework help, McEwen said.

"Especially now with report cards coming out we get an influx of calls from parents asking can we help their kids out," he said.

And demand for services at the the clubs' five locations has increased with the economy's struggles, program services director Mark Davis said.

"When the economy is bad we get more and more kids," he said.

"We're coming back from a large impact of not bringing in the dollars we used to," he said.

The clubs serve more than 900 kids ages 6 to 17 after school at clubhouses in Redlands, Mentone, Loma Linda, and San Bernardino.

Kids are charged \$15 a year; it costs the clubs \$1,000 per child per year.

He and McEwen said the community has always been very supportive of the clubs, even in bad economic times.

"It's one of our big fundraisers of the year and the chance for donors and people in the community to come together and support the club altogether," Davis said. "It allows us to keep our doors open, serve more kids in different communities.

At Chocolate Fantasy, businesses vie for best chocolatier, best restaurateur and best decorations. Besides food and champagne, there is dancing and live music - this time by B.O.E. - and live and silent auctions.

Michelle's Bakery, a family-owned bakery on Tennessee Street, has built a decade-long dynasty as best chocolatier. This year, newcomer Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory may give them a run for their money, McEwen said.

"It deals with chocolate and we're here in Redlands so we thought we'd try it out, and it's for a good cause," said owner Felix Torres, who owns the Redlands Rocky Mountain shop with his wife Stephanie.

He said she is planning to bring dipped cherries, "bears" - nuts, caramel and chocolate - and "tiger butter" - a combination of peanut butter, milk chocolate and white chocolate, which is made fresh in the store, Torres said.

"Last year we didn't do it because it was so close to Valentine's day we couldn't keep up with the demand in the store," he said. "Now we'll see how it turns out.

Greg Abt, who runs ABTsolutely Gourmet Catering out of Redlands, started participating in Chocolate Fantasy three or four years ago after hearing about it from the owners of Partners Pantry.

"It's a fun event - I get to see friends there and friends cooking," said Abt, who also works with Roberto Argentina at Farm Artisan Foods.

Abt, who caters part time, said he is bringing a chocolate confection and a Korean beef appetizer.

"I get one or two parties a year doing that (event), so it pays for itself in that regard," he said.

Davis said money raised at Chocolate Fantasy will also support transportation for field trips.

"We have kids who have never been to colleges and universities," he said. "Transportation is very expensive these days."

The clubs take kids to nearby universities, amusement parks, to the beach for cleanups and nearby locations like the Burrage Mansion.

"I just really appreciate the community supporting this event because this is what we do, we serve kids," Davis said.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands serve more than 900 kids ages 6 to 17 after school at clubhouses in Redlands, Mentone, Loma Linda, and San Bernardino.

Kids are charged \$15 a year; it costs the clubs \$1,000 per child per year.

E-mail Staff Writer Joy Juedes at [jjuedes@redlandsdailyfacts.com](mailto:jjuedes@redlandsdailyfacts.com)



*Vanilla and chocolate truffles made by Michelle's bakery sit side by side on a platter on Tuesday, February 2, 2010. The bakery will be supplying the chocolate truffles along with four other flavors to the Chocolate Fantasy fundraiser this Saturday. (Eric Tom)*