

Slow Food meal hits the spot for a good cause

By Katjusa Cisar - *The Capital Times*

Published Tuesday, January 26, 2010



Volunteers in the kitchen help Madison Club chefs (in white: Jason Veal at left, Dan Fox at right) prepare the Slow Food UW Family Night dinner on Monday.

I have wasted years smearing my bread with yellowing stick butter, left out on the kitchen counter to turn rancid.

No more. Not after the butter I tasted Monday at Slow Food UW's Family Dinner Night, prepared by Madison Club chefs Dan Fox and Jason Veal.

Whipped with a little sea salt and Ale Asylum's Tripel Nova and Hopalicious beer, the creamy butter melted divinely on still-warm slices of sourdough bread flecked with whole garlic cloves. Land O'Lakes, I hardly knew ye.

More than 110 people turned out at a church basement on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus for the locally sourced feast, the kickoff to the semester of weekly Family Dinner Nights that Slow Food UW organizes.

"Typically a guest chef buys the ingredients, then leads a group of eight to 12 others in preparing the food. Then everyone shows up, the guest chef talks about the food, and everyone eats," said Slow Food UW treasurer Stephen Collins.

The group has been steadily growing in the last few years -- from humble, one-table potlucks to hosting star guest chefs like Fox and Veal. The large turnout Monday night was one of the biggest the group has seen, rivaled only by their two-year anniversary celebration last October.

The meal cost \$5 (yes, really) and raised -- depending on to-be-determined food costs -- between \$900 and \$1,400 for Doctors Without Borders' Haiti Relief Fund, according to Collins.



So, what is slow food? Certainly not out-of-the-can green bean casserole or Jell-O marshmallow salad or anything that normally graces a typical church basement potluck. Slow Food UW is part of a national movement to support "good, clean and fair food" -- healthy, local and environmentally and economically friendly.



Fox and Veal sourced the ingredients for the meal locally. The negroni vinaigrette was made with Deaths Door Gin from Door County. The apples in the galette dessert came from Future Fruit Farm in Ridgeway. The chicken in the Coq au Vin came from Jordandal Farms in Argyle.

Volunteers showed up early to help Fox and Veal prepare the meal: peeling and chopping apples, stewing meat, tearing the leaves off tarragon (which releases a sweet

licorice smell).

Reasons for attending the dinner ranged from pure food enjoyment (mmm, butter) to a belief in supporting the slow food movement.

Daniel Crow came for the food.

"I just like to go where they cook good food for cheap," said Crow, who was eating the vegetarian option, a root vegetable and aged Gruyere gratin. He's been attending Slow Food UW dinners for a couple of years and said it's a good way to meet people.

Jeff Bessmer, the auditor at the Willy Street Co-op, said he came to the dinner to support fellow food activists. There are parallel groups on-campus and off-campus working on the same issues in Madison, he said, but too often they're split off from each other. (The Madison chapter of Slow Food U.S.A. has a website, for instance, but it appears to be out of date.)

"We're all very connected," he said, "and we're building more and more connections."

But it's not like the food didn't matter to him. After wolfing down a plate of apple galette, he shot a wanton glance at the dwindling platter of the dessert and murmured, "There's only one life to live. I'd might as well get some more."