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## Soup to Nuts: Harvest on the Harbor

**An all-star lineup of local chefs will be front and center at this year's Maine foodie event, which also boasts some big-name celebrity guests and, of course, lots of great food.**

By Meredith Goad [mgoad@mainetoday.com](mailto:mgoad@mainetoday.com)  
Staff Writer

Chef Michael Ruoss has enjoyed watching Portland's reputation as a food town grow ever since he toiled in the student kitchens at Southern Maine Community College.

Ruoss worked at the Seaman's Club and the Snow Squall just across the bridge, then went on to make a name for himself in New Orleans.

He worked his way up to chef de cuisine at Emeril Lagasse's flagship restaurant, NOLA, and now works on developing new restaurants with a restaurant group called 3 of a Kind.

"(Portland chefs are) really putting their footprint on the national scene as far as quality restaurants go and getting as




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good attention as they deserve," Ruoss said. "When I was there, the nicest restaurant was the Haraseeket Inn. Back when I was a student, that was the nice, fancy place to go to. And now you really can't pick one, there's so many."

Ruoss, who grew up in Old Orchard Beach, will be one of two "celebrity chefs" who are coming home to Maine this month to participate in the third annual Harvest on the Harbor food and wine festival Oct. 21-23 at Ocean Gateway on Portland's waterfront.

The other celebrity chef is Zac Young, a former Mainer, current executive pastry chef at Flex Mussels in New York City, and a contestant on the Bravo TV series "Top Chef Just Desserts," which will still be airing during Harvest on the Harbor.

According to Barbara Whitten, president of the Greater Portland Convention and Visitors Bureau, this year Harvest on the Harbor is expected to draw 5,000 people – with 38 percent coming from out of state – and generate more than \$2 million in direct spending.

Patricia Eltman, director of the Maine Office of Tourism, said the event "has successfully lengthened our fall travel season, motivating travelers to be here after foliage season."

"Our research shows an increasingly significant number of travelers say that food is the key aspect of their travel experience," Eltman said. "They believe experiencing a region's food is essential to understanding its culture."

Michael Ruoss finds some similarities in the food cultures of Maine and Louisiana.

"Both places, you cook out of your backyard," he said. "It's not like you're landlocked in Las Vegas, having to order all your stuff in the middle of the desert. You cook local produce and local seafood. It's very regional cooking, both in Maine and Louisiana."

Ruoss will be participating in the "Ultimate Seafood Splash," a two-hour orgy of seafood that will kick off this year's festival on Thursday, Oct. 21, in place of the Grand Tasting, which will still be a major part of the festival but takes place later that



Chefs participating in the Grand Tasting [click image to enlarge](#) on the Harbor gathered for a group photo last week on the Portland waterfront. Left to right are Al Hynes of the Black Point Inn, Jay Villani of Sonny's, Jeff Buerhaus of Walters, Justin Rowe of the Chebeague Island Inn, Alan Cook of Twenty Milk Street, Charles White of Cinque Terre, Melissa Bouchard of Dimillo's, Tony Lavelle of Solo Bistro, Eric Simeon of Grace, Christopher Bassett of Azure Cafe, Dan Crook of the Blue Wave Grill at the Wyndham Hotel, Jonathan Cartwright of the White Barn Inn, Harding Lee Smith of the Rooms, Jeff Landry of the Farmers Table, Joe Boudreau of Havana South and Mitchell Kaldrovich of Seaglass at the Inn by the Sea. Not pictured: Theda Lyden of the Haraseeket Inn.

*Photos by Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer*



Chefs William Clifford of the Portland Harbor Hotel, Kelly Patrick Farrin of Azure Cafe in Freeport and Clifford Pickett of Dimillo's in Portland are the three finalists in the Maine Lobster Chef of the Year competition.

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#### GRAND TASTING ON THE HARBOR

**WHEN:** 6 to 8:30 p.m. Oct. 21

**WHERE:** Ocean View Room at Ocean Gateway

**HOW MUCH:** \$65

**THERE ARE THREE CERTAINTIES** in autumn in Maine: the leaves will change color, the days will get shorter, and the Grand Tasting at Harvest on the

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evening.

It's one of several changes that have been made to Harvest on the Harbor this year. The number of wines served will more than double and include better-quality wines recommended by local chefs.

More than 400 wines will be available, from the Turina family's Italian wines made from Gropello and Marzemina grapes, to Veuve Clicquot Champagne Rose. (For a complete list, click on "Experience Harvest" then "Who's Pouring" at [HarvestOnTheHarbor.com](http://HarvestOnTheHarbor.com)).

There will be no showy evening events this year – no high-end dinners with top chefs, no fancy parties. While last year's Saturday soiree at the Landing at Pine Point was a lot of fun (who doesn't still dream about that huge oyster bar?), this year organizers are encouraging people to get out and sample local restaurants.

Another big change is designed to improve the Marketplace experience, where 160 to 170 vendors will be offering samples of their products. Last year the vendors were great, but overcrowding so dampened the experience (along with the steady rains that forced everyone under the tents) that people were openly complaining about it.

This year, the Marketplace has been moved to the large parking lot by Ocean Gateway, with a tent triple the size of last year's. The event has also been divided into two sessions to better accommodate ticket holders. Both Michael Ruoss and Zac Young will be at the marketplace.

Young, who will be hosting the Sweet Stage, says he tries to get back to Maine four times a year, especially in the fall for the major "eating" holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas. He always asks for his grandmother's pumpkin pie and matzoh ball soup, a family tradition.

"The best part of the soup is the carrots from her garden," Young wrote in an e-mail interview. "Hopefully I'll swipe some when I'm home for Harvest on the Harbor, if the groundhog doesn't get them first."

shorter, and the Grand Tasting at Harvest on the Harbor will sell out.

**THE GRAND TASTING** is a chance to sample the cuisine of numerous Maine chefs in a fun atmosphere with live music. Some of the chefs take the opportunity to try something a little different that's not normally on their menus.

**IT'S GOOD EXPOSURE** for the restaurants at a time when the summer crowds have gone back home and they need to start filling seats with locals again. It's also as much of a good time for the chefs – there are 17 participating this year – as it is for the people sampling their food.

**"FOR ME, IT'S REALLY** a good opportunity to talk to people that go out to eat a lot," said Eric Simeon, the chef at Grace in Portland. "And it's a good chance to co-mingle with other chefs and restaurant people."

**CHEF CHRISTOPHER BASSETT** of Azure Cafe in Freeport said it's a great way to expose several hundred people to his food in a single night. "You have to have a dish that definitely gives them a taste of your restaurant," he said, "but also makes a lasting memory really quick so they walk away from your table thinking about you. I like that opportunity."

**CHEF JONATHAN CARTWRIGHT** of the White Barn Inn calls the tasting and Harvest on the Harbor "a great event with a great following, and it gets bigger and bigger and better every year."

**HERE'S A LOOK** at what the 17 chefs will be serving at the Grand Tasting:

Chef Jeff Buerhaus, Walter's, Portland: Sake Kasu Tuna

Chef Eric Simeon, Grace, Portland: Seafood Sausage made with Maine shrimp and lobster

Chef Melissa Bouchard, DiMillo's, Portland: Seared Diver Scallop with Pumpkin Bisque and Bacon Jam

Chef Harding Lee Smith, The Rooms, Portland:

The Corner Room: Lamb Polpettine (Meatballs) with Porcini Mushroom-Goat Cheese Fondita; Chicken Liver Crostini

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Young's go-to restaurant when he's home is the Vientiane Market on Noyes Street in Portland.

"I grew up a block away, and I love how fresh and lively this Southeast Asian 'eat-in take-out' spot is," Young said. "Give me some summer rolls and tom yum soup and I am ready to go."

The Maine food he can't live without? Wild blueberries.

"There are some farms in upstate New York that try to grow low bush blueberries, but they are not the same," Young said. "The sweet/tart pop of a wild Maine blueberry is unparalleled. I'll pay top dollar if anyone wants to ship me a flat or 5."

Young also has fond memories of visiting the original Mister Bagel on Forest Avenue, and counts a bagel from that store as his favorite pastry in Portland.

"The late Rick Hartglass – 'Mister Bagel' himself – and my father were very close," Young said. "We went every morning before school. I remember being fascinated with the process of proofing, boiling and baking these treats, Rick would let me stand in the corner and watch. That store has the greatest smell in the world, a mixture of yeast, sugar and toast."

Ruoss will be at the Ultimate Seafood Splash on Thursday, and at the Savory Grilling Stage at the marketplace on Saturday.

At the Ultimate Seafood Splash, Ruoss will be serving a seafood gumbo similar to that served in one of his company's Louisiana restaurants, Gumbo Shop.

When he's not busy at Harvest on the Harbor, Ruoss will be visiting some of the old haunts he stops by whenever he comes home for a visit. His visits used to come once a year, but ever since Hurricane Katrina hit, trips home have stretched to every other year.

His must-do list includes a clam cake from Rapid Ray's in Saco and a visit to Fore Street in Portland, because he is "a huge fan" of Chef Sam Hayward.

The Grill Room: Beet Tartare with Truffle Aioli

The Front Room: Cheddar Apple Bacon Grilled Cheese on Brioche

Chef Dan Crook, The Blue Wave Grille, The Wyndham Hotel, South Portland: Roasted Corn Ahi Avocado Tower with Caper-Lime Essence

Chef Alan Cook, Twenty Milk Street, Portland: Crostini with Herbed Goat Cheese and Forest Mushroom Confit

Chef Christopher Bassett, Azure Cafe, Freeport: Saffron Poached Potato and Roasted Garlic Balsamic Glazed Lobster with Red Amaranth Microgreens

Chef Jeff Landry, The Farmer's Table, Portland: Housemade charcuterie, including Bresaola and some chicken- or pork-based pate. Also serving fall pickles, including balsamic pickled beets, onion, and carrots or squash

Chef Al Hynes, Black Point Inn, Prouts Neck: Lamb Chops Peperonata and Cream Puffs

Chef Charles White, Cinque Terre, Portland: Duck Consomme and Duck Confit with Apricot Mostarda

Chef Tony Lavelle, Solo Bistro, Bath: Cured Halibut with a Ginger Beet Glaze and a Pickled Onion Relish

Chef Justin Rowe, Chebeague Island Inn: Devils on Horseback – Great Hill blue cheese-stuffed date wrapped in applewood-smoked bacon

Chef Jay Villani, Sonny's, Portland: Seasonal ceviche

Chef Jonathan Cartwright, The White Barn Inn, Kennebunk: Yellowfin Tuna with a Coconut-Cucumber Marinade

Chef Mitchell Kaldrovich, Sea Glass at Inn by the Sea, Cape Elizabeth: Cured Salmon Tartare on Cones

Chef Theda Lyden, Harraseeket Inn, Freeport: Whipped Triple Creme on Tender Pastries with House-Dried Tomatoes and Thai Basil; Petite Lobster Mousse Eclairs

"I don't consider it a trip home without going to Fore Street and then swinging by L.L. Bean at 2 o'clock in the morning," Ruoss said.

His final treat is loading up his suitcase with a case of Moxie before flying home.

Moxie? Hear that, Harvest on the Harbor?

Maybe in 2011 ...

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## **THE ULTIMATE SEAFOOD SPLASH**

**WHEN:** 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Oct. 21

**WHERE:** Ocean View Room, Ocean Gateway

**HOW MUCH:** \$45.

If it's seafood you're interested in, this is the ticket to buy.

Benkay Japanese Restaurant & Sushi Bar will be providing the sushi, and there will be lots of local oysters shucked by the Maine Aquaculture Association.

Smoked salmon? Yep. Mussels and scallops? You betcha.

Chef Michael Ruoss, a celebrity chef visiting from New Orleans, will be introducing Mainers to his seafood gumbo.

"It's kind of the Cajun version of chowder," he said. "Everyone in New Orleans has got a different gumbo – one name, but a thousand recipes, just like peoples' chowders up north are totally different."

Ruoss will be getting help preparing his gumbo from the culinary arts students at Southern Maine Community College, his alma mater.

The students will be doing much of the prep work for him, and he'll arrive early Thursday morning to teach them how to prepare the gumbo before bringing it to Portland for the

Chef Joe Boudreau, Havana South, Portland: Spice Rubbed Seared Rare Sushi Grade Yellowfin Tuna on a Flour Tortilla Chip with a Charred Local Fennel and Tomato Salsa; Roasted Lamb Tenderloin on Roasted Jalapeno, Corn and Potato Cake

seafood splash.

"I'm looking forward to working with Will Beriau, who was my instructor 20 years ago and now he's going to be my sous chef, helping me out cooking all the stuff," Ruoss said, chuckling. "And I get to boss him around, finally. A little payback time. He's going to be doing the dishes."

Beriau remembers Ruoss as "a skinny kid, and very ambitious, well spoken, worldly, and very interested in cooking."

"Mike is a great example of a person that saw beyond the horizon and went out and really made something of himself," Beriau said. "And now he's coming back to share. I think this is an absolutely wonderful opportunity for our culinary students."

Other seafood that will be served at the splash includes shrimp and crab from Old Port Sea Grill, and lobster rolls from Portland Lobster Co.

Remember the Lobster Club Sandwich throwdown in Rockland? Lynn Archer of the Brass Compass Cafe will be preparing her "Princess Lobster Club," the sandwich that made Bobby Flay her, um well, let's just say she taught the Food Network star a thing or two.

#### **MAINE LOBSTER CHEF OF THE YEAR COMPETITION**

**WHEN:** 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Oct. 22

**WHERE:** Ocean View Room, Ocean Gateway

**HOW MUCH:** \$55

Will it be Herb Grilled Maine Lobster Tail on Arugula with Chive Ricotta Gnocchi & Corn Milk?

Or will it be the Rustic Maine Lobster and Butternut Squash Ravioli with Toasted Walnuts, Sage and Maple Bacon?

Maybe the judges will prefer the Steamed Maine Lobster & Sweet Corn Tamale with Creamy Chilis and Leeks.

Those are the three dishes that will be duking it out at this year's Maine Lobster Chef of the Year competition, a cook-off that will be held in front of 200 people and be filmed for broadcast on the New England Sports Network. (Yes, cooking is apparently now a bona

fide sport.)

This year's competitors are Chef William (Bill) Clifford, 42, the new chef at the Portland Harbor Hotel who will be making the lobster and butternut squash ravioli dish; Chef Clifford Pickett, 27, a banquet chef at DiMillo's in Portland who will be making the lobster and sweet corn tamale; and Chef Kelly Patrick Farrin, 27, of the Azure Cafe in Freeport, who will be making the herb grilled Maine lobster tail.

The winning chef gets a \$1,000 prize and bragging rights for themselves and their restaurants.

The contest began with recipe submissions that were judged by Chef Sam Hayward of Fore Street restaurant in Portland; Chef Will Beriau, professor of culinary arts at Southern Maine Community College; Chef Steve Corry of Five Fifty-Five restaurant in Portland; and Kathleen Fleury of Downeast magazine.

Ticket holders to the event will get to watch the chefs prepare their dishes, taste them and then vote on a winner.

#### **THE PERFECT PAIRING: PRESENTING MAINE'S JAMES BEARD AWARD WINNERS**

**WHEN:** 5 to 7 p.m. Oct. 22

**WHERE:** Ocean View Room, Ocean Gateway

**HOW MUCH:** \$55

There should be a rule about having so much culinary talent in one room, kind of like the rule that says the president and his Cabinet have to be separated during national emergencies.

On the other hand, sampling all the James Beard winners' food in one night might just put your taste buds on lockdown, making it impossible for you to ever go back to mere meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

The chefs, in case you didn't know already, are Sam Hayward of Portland's Fore Street, Melissa Kelly of Primo in Rockland, and this year's winners of Best Chef in the Northeast, Clark Frasier and Mark Gaier of Arrows.

They'll be cooking, doing demonstrations and offering tips for those of us who only dream of greatness in the kitchen.

And yes, there is indeed someone missing. Chef Rob Evans, Maine's other resident Best Chef, had a previous commitment and won't be able to attend. So there will be someone left should there be a national culinary emergency.

Whew.

### **SAVORY SAMPLINGS AT THE MARKETPLACE**

**WHEN:** Session 1: Noon to 2:30 p.m. Oct. 23

Session 2: 4 to 6:30 p.m. Oct. 23

**WHERE:** Oceanside Pavilion, Ocean Gateway

**HOW MUCH:** \$35 per session (sessions are identical)

Roam the marketplace sampling food and wines from more than 160 vendors while listening to lots of live music.


Satisfy your inner Cajun at the Savory Grilling Stage, where New Orleans Chef Michael Ruoss will be grilling sausages and other meats from Kayem Foods. DennyMike's and 'Cue Culture will be talking barbecue at the event.


Stonewall Kitchen and Simply Divine Brownies will also be at the Sweet Stage, demonstrating how they create their popular confections.

The host of the Sweet Stage will be former Mainer Zac Young, fresh off his appearance on "Top Chef Just Desserts," which will be airing on Bravo during Harvest on the Harbor. Young says he'll be making chocolate cream pie "on its side," a reconstruction of the classic. "There will be glitter," he promises, referring to the "disco dust" edible glitter he has used on the TV show.

Young can't give away the ending to "Top Chef," but says he loved the challenges and that it was "an amazing adventure and fantastic learning experience for me."

"To cook next to a bevy of chefs at the top of their game was inspiring," he said. "We all left the show better chefs."

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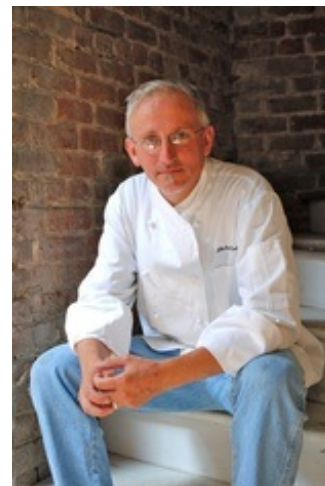
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Bouchard of Wicked Whoopies will be preparing a signature Harvest whoopie pie for the Maine Lobster Chef of the Year competition on Oct. 22 at Ocean Gateway. These Whoop-de-Doos are her classic Wicked Whoopie dipped in chocolate.



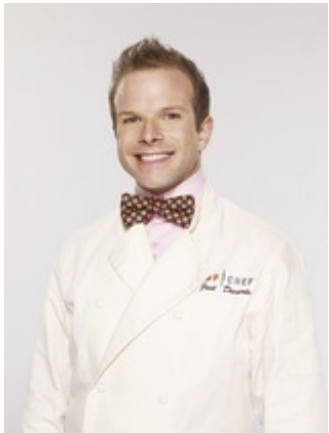
This apple [click image to enlarge](#)

and crab salad, made with local McIntosh apples, lightly dressed and served on endive, was prepared by Chef Mitchell Kaldrovich of Cape Elizabeth's Inn by the Sea for a preview of Harvest on the Harbor. Kaldrovich is one of 17 chefs who will be cooking for the Grand Tasting on the Harbor Oct. 21 at Ocean Gateway.



Michael [click image to enlarge](#)

Ruoss will prepare his seafood gumbo for the Ultimate Seafood Splash.  
Courtesy photo



Zac Young [click image to enlarge](#)  
will host the Sweet Stage on Oct. 23.  
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