

RUM CONNOISSEURS

Local chefs show rum's versatility with food

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SARASOTA — Jill Caruso has lived in Sarasota for almost 20 years. But before Wednesday, she didn't know what she was missing.

Her friends brought her to a rum-tasting event at Drum Circle Distilling, where the award-winning Siesta Key rum is distilled. Siesta Key rums earned five gold medals at the 2015 Miami Rum Renaissance Festival and numerous other accolades.

During the event, about 25 participants toured the Drum Circle Distillery before trying a selection of rum-fused foods and desserts. Chef Melissa Dedloff made Caribbean-inspired food, including roasted mojo pork slathered with a guava rum glaze, Suncoast Gulf ceviche and smoked corn and crab chowder.

Chef Robert Gaglio called upon his Italian-Sicilian heritage to make tiramisu with rum, torta ricotta with spiced rum and fig syrup and biscotti that those attending dipped into spiced rum.

Troy Roberts, the CEO and head distiller of Drum Circle, told the group to help themselves to rum from the tasting room before the tour started.

“This isn't one of those tours where we make you wait 'til the end,” he said.

He asked the group if the spiced rum was their favorite. A few hands shot up. Toasted coconut? Half the group raised their hands.

The secret to good rum, Roberts said, is spices. He's had offers to sell him natural flavors, which are artificial flavorings that imitate the taste of spices, but he's always refused.

“We don't use this stuff: never have, never will,” he said.

In the coconut rum, the distiller uses real toasted coconut. When the entire flavor is extracted, they give the used fruit to a local farmer who dries it out to remove the alcohol and feeds it to his livestock.

Roberts has been selling his rum on the market since 2010, he said.

Kevin Kawa, another distiller, showed the group the equipment used to make the rum. He uses molasses, which is combined with hot water, before being fermented for about five days. As part of the complex distilling process, the rum is stored in barrels.

Drum Circle will trade off barrels with JDub's brewery to make Siesta Key's Beer Barrel Finish Spiced rum. For this, the rum ages in a barrel previously used for beer. JDub's will do the same, making beers in barrels that previously held rum.

“Each batches' flavor is going to be unique and different,” Kawa said.

When the tour finished, the previously empty white-and-tan cloth table was filled with rum-infused treats. Dedloff stood behind the table serving food while Gaglio talked to people in the group.

Having done culinary tours in Italy and Sarasota, Gaglio brought up combining his food tours and Roberts' rum about a year ago. He made about 900 tiramisu for Wednesday and another event he did Tuesday.

By the end of the event, Caruso's friends seemed to have won her over. She loved the toasted coconut rum.

Carole Peschel and Mary Harper sat next to Caruso after the tour, raving about Gaglio's tiramisu.

“Even people who don't eat tiramisu eat his tiramisu,” she said.

Before she left, Peg Corke asked Gaglio for a Ziploc bag.

“I'm bringing this home,” she said, carrying a bag full of chocolate-dipped biscotti.



Chef Melissa Dedloff and Chef Robert Gaglio teamed up with Siesta Key Rum to give about 25 guests the chance to see how rum is made before sampling it straight along with their creations infused with the spiced rum. Dedloff made Caribbean-inspired food including roasted mojo port with a guava rum glaze and Suncoast gulf ceviche. Gaglio called upon his Italian heritage to make tiramisu with rum and biscotti dipped in spiced rum.