

Lewisburg Chocolate Fest features cocoa spiriter

MARTA TANKERSLEY HAYS | Sunday Gazette-Mail

From what looks like chocolate glass, pastry chef Gina Lang curls dark chocolate into “cigarettes” to decorate chocolate mousse at her Greenbrier Valley Baking Co. in downtown Lewisburg.

Photo courtesy of the GREENBRIER COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU A young competitor gets more than a little messy during last year’s hands-free chocolate mousse eating contest at the Lewisburg Chocolate Festival.

Photo courtesy of the GREENBRIER COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU A street performer delights children with balloon animals.

Photo courtesy of the LEWISBURG CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL Decked out as Willy Wonka, Lewisburg Mayor John Manchester presides over events at the annual chocolate festival.

Photo courtesy of the LEWISBURG CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL Greenbrier resort chef Rich Rosendale demonstrated the art of the chocolatier at the chocolate festival.

MARTA TANKERSLEY HAYS | Sunday Gazette-Mail Pastry chef Gina Lang will be one of more than 40 vendors at the Lewisburg Chocolate Festival Saturday.



Related Facts

Want to go?

Chocolate Festival

WHEN: Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

WHERE: Downtown Lewisburg

COST: Admission is free. Tastings and event purchases apply. Purchase advance tickets online at lewisburgchocolatefestival.com

INFO: Call 800-833-2068 or lewisburgchocolatefestival.com

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Visitors to the ninth annual Lewisburg Chocolate Festival this coming Saturday can expect a chocolate wonderland full of sweet treats and unexpected delights, thanks to inventive chefs like Gina Lang, of Greenbrier Valley Baking Co., who plans to dazzle taste buds with her white chocolate whiskey butter truffle.

“My mentor at culinary school didn’t drink at all, but she said, ‘Boozy sweets are the best thing,’” said Lang. “Alcohol by itself can be quite bitter. I mean, if you add whiskey to sugar, it’s amazing. If you add kirschwasser, which is a cherry brandy, the minute you add it to chocolate or anything sweet, it’s perfect on your palate. It’s a great thing.”

Most people agree. Chocolate is a great thing, no matter how you prepare it.

Our love affair with chocolate, which has been proclaimed as both an antidepressant and an aphrodisiac at one time or another, began long ago.

Used as currency in the Americas during pre-Columbian times, the cocoa bean has been celebrated throughout time. Spanish and Portuguese explorers brought it to Europe in the 1500s where it remained a virtual secret from the rest of the continent for almost 100 years.

Served as a frothy drink available almost exclusively to the European aristocracy for centuries, chefs began experimenting by adding sugar and other spices to develop flavors more suitable to their palates.

The first chocolate bars, made for use in drinks in the mid-1800s, convinced a few visionaries that chocolate could be eaten too. By the turn of the century, Milton Snavely Hershey, of Pennsylvania — Hershey, Pennsylvania — introduced his now-famous milk chocolate bar and the Hershey's Kiss — bringing the elusive flavorful delight to the masses.

A new industry was born and is approaching \$93 billion in sales globally, according to [MarketsandMarkets.com](https://www.marketsandmarkets.com), a Dallas-based research firm.

Back in Lewisburg, Kristy Godby, a Chocolate Festival committee member, said the city will raise about \$20,000 for United Way during the one-day event.

“That’s about 10 percent of our budget, so it’s a big income maker for us,” Godby said.

She is expecting more than 5,000 people to flood the downtown area to take advantage of the many activities planned.

The main event at the festival is the Chocolate Tasting Extravaganza, which features unique chocolates at more than 40 downtown locations. While there are thousands of individual samples available, people are urged by event organizers to purchase tickets — sold for \$1 each in packs of five — in advance.

“We’d hate for people to show up at 2 o’clock when samples may be running low, and be disappointed because vendors are sold out,” said Godby.

“A lot of the merchants have their chocolate tastings inside their shops, so you get to come in, and while you get your chocolate you get to also see what we have in the area,” she said. “Our great women’s clothing stores and our great antique shops. You can do a little shopping and chocolate! What’s better than that?”

Beyond shopping and chocolate, there are many other activities planned for the day.

Events include the HospiceCare 10K Chocolate Chase, a chocolate brunch, free screenings of “Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory” and “Chocolat” at the historic Lewis Theatre, a bake-off to benefit the Greenbrier Humane Society and more.

Lewisburg Mayor John Manchester — dressed as Willie Wonka himself in a purple hat and coat — will preside over the annual chocolate mousse eating contest hosted by Stella’s, a local restaurant.

Twelve contestants in three age groups are chosen to participate via a random drawing. Winners will receive a



certificate and are invited back the following year to defend their titles.

“It’s a sloppy event, but it’s fun,” contest organizer Annamarie Visclosky said. “Contestants have to put their hands behind their backs, and they have to eat it. We do have a clean-up station for at the end — so no worries.”

Some local eateries are even adding special chocolate dishes to their menus in honor of the festival.

The folks at Del Sol Cantina & Grille celebrate their Latin roots by offering a modern twist on a traditional South American chocolate mole (pronounced MO-lay) — or sauce — during the festival.

“We always do a chicken mole, but this year we decided to try and do a more modern mole concept,” owner Tony Juker said. “We’re putting an angel hair pasta with a tomato-chocolate sauce and grilled chicken breast on the menu. We’re also doing a chocolate martini.”

Other restaurants planning to add chocolate to their menus include:

- n Food & Friends, where you can try char-grilled beef tenderloin medallions with a Rogue chocolate stout mushroom sauce;
- n The Livery, featuring smoked beef ribs with chocolate barbecue sauce;
- n The General Lewis Inn’s rib-eye with a chocolate stout pan sauce;
- n Stardust Cafe, featuring a local pork chop with a chocolate miso marinade; and
- n Stella’s, whose culinary special is yet to be announced.

Also, executive pastry chef Jean-Francois Suteau, from The Greenbrier resort in White Sulphur Springs, and pastry sous chef Alex McClenaghan, from the Omni Homestead Resort in Virginia, will host free chocolatier demonstrations, Suteau at 1 p.m. at City National Bank, and McClenaghan at 2 p.m. at the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

For more information on the schedule, tickets and registrations, visit [lewisburgchocolate festival.com](http://lewisburgchocolatefestival.com) or call 800-833-2068.

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