

Food & Drink

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Restaurateurs rise to Girl Scout cookie challenge

BY KRISTINE CANNON
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The sight of destroying sleeves upon sleeves of Samoas would make anyone's heart stop, but for 22 restaurants throughout central and Northern Arizona, it's for a worthy cause.

The Girl Scout Cookie Dessert Challenge returns for its sixth year, and several restaurants throughout Scottsdale are taking part in the month-long challenge of transforming all six, beloved Girl Scouts Cookies into a custom dessert menu item.

Through Feb. 28, a portion of the proceeds from each dessert sold at all participating restaurants will go directly to Girl Scouting in Arizona.

Scottsdale-area restaurants include Babbo Italian Eatery, PNPK Craft Slider + Wine Bar, Proof Canteen at Four Seasons Scottsdale Resort Troon North, The Herb Box, The Thumb and ZuZu at Hotel Valley Ho.

Many restaurants this year invited Girl Scouts members to an interactive, behind-the-scenes field trip, where the



Proof Canteen Chef Lance Whipple shows the Girl Scouts how to use liquid nitrogen during one of their Girl Scout Cookie Challenge field trips on Jan. 26 at Four Seasons Scottsdale Resort Troon North. (Pablo Robles/Progress Staff Photographer)

girls helped chefs create their respective sweet creations.

The girls even learned a few important lessons along the way.

Proof Canteen chef Lance Whipple taught the group of Girl Scouts how to make ice cream – and it was a lesson they won't soon forget.

"Bet you didn't know you were going to science class," Whipple said as he pulled out a canister of liquid nitrogen – the Girl Scouts and their respective moms, alike, oohing and aahing at the sight.

This is Proof Canteen's third year participating in the challenge.

Thin Mints were the star of Proof Canteen's Thin Mint brownie dessert last year, and they sold nearly 100 of the desserts, raising approximately \$250.

This year, however, Whipple worked with the ultra-popular Samoas to create a coconut chocolate Samoas ice cream cake with gooey caramel sauce.

The ice cream cake sells for \$12, or \$17 for an extra scoop of coconut Samoas ice cream.

"We played around with some of the other cookies, but we

found that between the Thin Mints and the Samoas, they sell themselves, and with one dollar going back to the Girl Scouts, we wanted to go for massive amounts of sales so we can give back," Whipple said.

Proof Canteen's pastry cook Calena Srutowski, who assisted Whipple during the field trip, wanted to teach the girls that all products can be transformed into something new. All it takes is a bit of imagination and creativity.

"It's not just a cookie," Srutowski said. "You can always twist it and make it into something fun and new, maybe for yourself or someone else to show them what excitement there is in products."

Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North spokeswoman Jennifer Franklin said the challenge was a natural fit.

"We have a lot of female chefs in our culinary brigade here, so we really feel



Girl Scout Helen Nesbitt, 12, shows off her finished dessert, the Samoas cannoli, during the Girl Scout's field trip to Aioli Burger in Phoenix on Jan. 22. (Kimberly Carrillo/Progress Staff Photographer)



Proof Canteen at Four Seasons Scottsdale Resort Troon North Chef Lance Whipple used Samoas to create a coconut chocolate Samoas ice cream cake with gooey caramel sauce. (Alex Anton/Special to the Progress)



PNPK Craft Slider + Wine Bar in northern Scottsdale used the Do-si-dos to create a dessert flight. It sells for \$8, and a portion of the proceeds to directly to Girl Scouting in Arizona. (Alex Anton/Special to the Progress)

it's important to have an opportunity to show girls what it's like to work in a real kitchen and what the environment of a hospitality industry is like," she said. "We thought it'd be a lot of fun."

Franklin's sentiment is echoed by Susan de Queljoe, spokeswoman for Girl Scouts-Arizona Cactus-Pine Council.

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"It's so inspiring to see Original Gravity, PNPK, Zuzu at Hotel Valley Ho, The Herb Box and Lovecraft taking part since they are all either proud woman-owned businesses or have female chefs in the kitchen," de Queljoe said.

At Proof Canteen, Srutowski stressed to the Girl Scouts that, regardless of gender, if you put your mind to it, you can do anything.

"It's not necessarily more of a matter of 'that's a guy thing, that's a girl's thing.' It's more, if you're passionate about what you want to do, then you can do it," she said.

Alicia Crockett's 10-year-old daughter is Jaida Isom. Crockett said Isom was particularly excited for the field trip because she loves baking and trying new recipes.

"All the time at home she's rattling pots and trying to come up with creations, and

she loves cookies," Crockett said. "So, to kind of mesh those two together and learn hands-on is why she was so excited."

Aioli Burger in Phoenix also worked with the Samoas, a cookie that Executive Chef Tom D'Ambrosio said they had to fight to secure.

"Every chef wants the Samoas cookie, so they always go really fast," D'Ambrosio said. "This year, we were ahead of the ballgame."

This is Aioli Burger's second year participating in the cookie challenge, and D'Ambrosio created a Samoas cannoli, comprised of a crispy cannoli shell dipped in milk chocolate and toasted coconut, filled with Samoas cookies, mascarpone cream and drizzled with chocolate and caramel sauce.

Each Samoas cannoli sells for \$3.50 each.

New to the challenge this year is PNPK Craft Slider + Wine Bar in northern Scott-

sdale.

Owner Kellie Pruitt, female business owner and former CFO, created a flight of three Do-si-dos-inspired desserts – consistent with PNPK's food flight concept.

The mini desserts include a chocolate peanut butter cheesecake with a Do-si-dos crust, peanut butter banana pudding made with crumbled Do-si-dos, and a peanut butter and jelly pie, also with a do-si-dos crust.

The dessert flight sells for \$8.

Pruitt, who actually started her career as a police officer and then became an accountant before owning her own restaurant, also wanted to teach the girls that they can do anything they want to do, so long as they put their mind to it.

"Every field I've been in was very male-dominated, and I hope that I can be a role model to these girls," she said.

Many of the girls who attended the field trips said the Girl Scouts has taught them

how to better manage money.

But 9-year-old Chandler Scout Isla McMullan said she's also learned people skills.

"I wanted to join because I get to do so many things to help the community and because it's fun to hang out with my friends, who are in Girl Scouts," said Isla, who has been a member of the Girl Scouts for one year.

In years past, the dessert challenge champion was determined by dessert sales, but this year, the council is leaving it up to the public to decide the winner by voting in a poll on the Girl Scouts' website.

To vote and for a full list of participating restaurants and their respective desserts, visit girlscoutsaz.org/dessertchallenge.

And if you haven't purchased your fair share of Girl Scouts cookies yet, you have plenty of time left. Cookies are available through March 3. 🍪