

Food association grows out of Pickering

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By [Kristen Calis](#)

PICKERING -- It's time to buy local when it comes to food, says a new group stemming out of Pickering.

The Durham Culinary Association, a social networking organization to build awareness of local food and to support Durham food producers, culinary professionals and artisan food manufacturers, recently started up, and has quickly gathered interest from local restaurants, schools and politicians.

Culinary Association co-founder Philippe Trepanier, a certified Chef Du Cuisine, a consultant with various hospitality venues, and Pickering resident, has long been thinking of a way for local chefs to interact and share knowledge about who's growing what in the region.

"The more we look at this, the more we realize it's all about networking," he said.

Meanwhile, Dunbarton High School teacher, farmer and culinary association co-founder James Blair and his students set up a farmers' market at Dunbarton last fall. The market was successful and ended with a chef's challenge where local chefs were invited to a cook-off, using food from local producers.

So Mr. Blair and Mr. Trepanier put their heads together and came up with the plans for an association.



Ryan Pfeiffer / Metroland

PICKERING -- Chef Philippe Trepanier, a member of the Durham Culinary Association, was at Hendrix Restaurant Equipment and Supplies preparing a dish with Dunbarton High School's junior chef team Jan. 13. The new culinary group has the goal of bringing local schools, farmers and chefs together in the Durham Region. with him, from left, were Alessandro Pistrutto, Michelle Kakar, Dimitiz Rahimi and Kysa Bashir. January 13, 2010.

They hope to create and maintain a directory of food service industry professionals living in Durham, linking them with producers. This will create profitable partnerships for local businesses committed to bringing local food products to the consumer, as well as benefitting the farmers.

Plans include educating Durham students on the food that's available in the region and teaching them about the industry and what they'll have to do to get involved. The idea is to get local farmers and chefs to guest teach the kids, to hopefully get them interested in maintaining the local industry in the future.

Mr. Blair is working with the Durham District School Board to implement farmers' markets at all high schools across the region and hopes to also involve the Durham Catholic School Board.

"I want Pickering to be a focal point of things that can be done when you get schools involved," he said.

Ward 1 Regional Councillor Bonnie Littley, a long-time advocate of the Durham Region food charter, a document outlining the values of local food, agrees with the education component.

"It gets kids thinking about where their food comes from and why it's important to maintain that," she said.

Mr. Trepanier added it would be ideal to get schools to grow some of their own food and perhaps use it in breakfast programs for the kids.

"There are a ton of things that would allow people to benefit," he said.

Coun. Littley feels the association is going to be a catalyst to finally getting a permanent food policy council in the region.

"I'm very excited and I think we're on the right path for our own municipality and particularly regional," she said.

She feels there's a huge advantage to the local economy with farmers selling to local businesses and restaurateurs.

"I think it's an economic sector that's been thoroughly neglected but has huge potential," she said.

Mr. Blair pointed out local high-end chefs often buy food from outside of Canada because local farmers don't sell some of the products they need, or other countries sell it for much less. Farmers, he said, may be reluctant to change since they're unsure whether they'll get a return on their investment.

This is where the association will come into play, providing interaction between farmers and producers, allowing them to share their needs and concerns directly.

Mr. Blair added buying locally not only funds local industry but also allows consumers to know exactly where their food is

coming from.

"It's almost like there are more regulations to where your shoes come from than what you put in your body," he said.

The Durham Culinary Association is holding an open general meeting for chefs, farmers and food enthusiasts on Thursday, Feb. 25 at 7:30 p.m. at Dunbarton High School, 655 Sheppard Ave., Pickering.

For more information:

CALL: 905-839-7977

VISIT: www.durhamculinaryassociation@live.ca