

Food, Food & more Food

Right across the Caribbean there's a lot happening. Many of us may not know but, this is the time when hard-working visionary people are busy trying to get their festivals and events in place. Many are up 'till all times of the morning organising as with the case of Neysa Soodeen (BET MACO Food & Rum Festival 2007 - Nov.1-4) who sent me an email at 3:30 a.m.! Not long after, came one from Stephanie Scott (Kingston Restaurant Week 2007 - Nov. 10 to 17).

The adage about the early birds getting the first worms works for me this week so I will begin with St. Lucia in earnest, touching lightly on Kingston. Next week I will veer into Barbados' Crop Over (ends August 1st), talk about Grenada's Carnival (August) keeping The Gleaner's Restaurant Week in mind all the while as I get more news about plans. Last year's event in the capital city proved to be a huge success with restaurants filled to capacity. Stephanie Scott must get all the help required to continue this upward trend. Some 30 restaurants are already on the card, so don't get left behind - early 'hooking up' gives better chance for promotional stories. Her contact is intek01@mail.infochan.com

With inter-island travel easier thanks to our heads of state and Caribbean Single Market Economy there's no time better than now to spend some of our hard-earned dollars right in our backyard.

Amazing St. Lucian Woman

The land of the amazing Pitons and the most beautiful parrot in the world; of a people so steeped in their culture that French/African patois is spoken as easily as English; an island where, during its French tenure, the rich and famous of the courts of France lounged in large estate homes and bathed in rivers that brought life back to their sick bones. With these rivers still catapulting down from lush mountainsides into the sea below, locals and visitors can today sunbathe their cares away. St. Lucia is home for the famous St. Lucia Jazz Festival with another niche festival added to its repertoire making waves - a food and rum extravaganza conceptualised by Soodeen of MACO magazine fame, now in its second year.

Invitees include Jessica Harris. The author of nine critically-acclaimed cookbooks that document the food and food-ways of the African Diaspora, Harris is currently working on a narrative history of African-Americans and food. Known as a culinary historian having lectured at The Museum of Natural History in New York City and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Dr. Harris as she is professionally known, is also a journalist who has written book, theatre reviews and travel features in *Gourmet*, *Food & Wine* and *Essence*. She has made numerous television appearances on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Food Network* and *Sara Moulton's Cooking Live*; has worked as a consultant with Kraft Foods, Pillsbury and Unilever and is a member of Sterling Rice's culinary council that serves as a think tank for major food manufacturers. Harris has been honored numerous times for spreading the word of African and Caribbean cuisines around the world; has received the Heritage Award from the Black Culinarists and the Food Hero award from *Eating Well* magazine.

She has been given a lifetime achievement award by the Southern Foodways Alliance and received the Toque award from Philadelphia's *the Book & the Cook*, joining culinary notables such as the late Julia Child and Jacques Pepin.

Makes no sense to even try to continue - let's just get it straight - this lady is one whopping amazing woman who is worth seeing, worth listening and talking to and St. Lucia's BET MACO Food & Rum Festival will be ever richer for having her.

Mixologists, Rums and Chefs

Mixologists and chefs galore will be there: Tony Abou Ganim, (featured on *Iron Chef*); Ian Burrell, the face of the London bar scene for some twelve years and a Rum Ambassador. His restaurant and cocktail bar, Cottons, boasts the largest collection of rums in London. Being of Jamaican descent, Ian claims rum is in his blood and started The Appleton Rum Academy in New Zealand - a rum training programme for the top bartenders in New Zealand that included rum history and rum cocktail knowledge. He helped launch Appleton Rums in Australia with a series of rum cocktail training sessions in Sydney and Melbourne too.

Talking rums - news is that Appleton will be there! Fabulous. I am excited at this prospect. By the way, news has reached that St. Lucia Distilleries' and Carl Stevenson's Elements Rum (launched last year) has copped three titles for its two rums in *Esquire* magazine's August 2007 edition. Best rum for sipping and mixing with Elements 8 'Old Fashioned' being the preferred cocktail for some of its three million U.K. readers! Wow!

Shall we see an Appleton/Element rum-off in St. Lucia? Would be great to pit rum against rum in a taste-test between friends in the business eh? There are so many 'biggies' going to be there - Angostura, Mount Gay, St. Vincent Distillers, Pyrat Rum from Anguilla, Suriname's Alcoholic Beverages just to name a few. A rum-off could be opportune!

Chefs include Robert Oliver (consultant and agri-tourism), whose Asian/Caribbean fusion cuisine hit it off really well last year; Bobo Bergstrom and his Eurobban cuisine - he puts St. Lucian chocolate on beef tenderloin, believe it or not. Newcomers Chef Eoghain O'Neill (a Trini/Irish) who is making huge waves at Raffles Restaurant on the Grenadine island of Canouan and St. Lucian David Payne whose accomplishments and culinary expertise has had him featured in many magazines. Other chefs include Craig Jones; Douane Dove from Trinidad & Tobago is not to be left out with his extraordinary presentations of Caribbean cocoa paired with fine aged rum. The list is actually endless.