

Edited by Kim Schneider

Confection

The Great Lakes Science Center shows us its sweet side with an exhibit dedicated to chocolate.

by **Tori Woods** Obsession



than most cultures. From the ubiquitous Kiss to the elegant gold boxes of Godivas, we chocoholic Americans spend about \$13 billion on the 3.3 billion pounds we eat each year.

"There are stories interwoven in the exhibit about chocolate in pop culture, chocolate in myth, chocolate in American tradition," says Abraham-Silver.

The Science Center has also left its own chocolatey fingerprint on the exhibit: A demonstration area, called the Chocolate Bar, allows visitors to investigate the properties of chocolate, such as its melting point and acidity. Guests can also create chocolate ice cream with liquid nitrogen and make chocolate lip balm. Special events and activities include a chocolate Labrador retriever celebration in April, and a Valentine's Day wine and chocolate tasting hosted in partnership with the Cleveland Wine School — which sounds way classier than our daily trip to the office candy basket.

Another facet of the exhibit will be a large chocolate store, featuring a variety of specialty chocolates and chocolate products. It's an important component of the exhibit; learning about chocolate sounds fun, but tasting a variety once you've become an expert sounds doubly fun. And the calories don't count, right? It's all in the name of science, after all.

We love chocolate. We love it so much that we take the long way back to our desks to swing by the person who has the candy basket, and then we fish out the last Hershey's Kisses. In fact, Americans love chocolate so much that we consume about 12 pounds of it per year. That's no confection.

So this month, where Valentine's Day offers a sweet and sugary high point in the midst of slush and gray skies, the Great Lakes Science Center is providing another way to celebrate this beloved indulgence.

Chocolate: The Exhibition! opens Feb. 9 and allows visitors to experience — and, yes, don't worry, sample — chocolate in all its forms. The national tour of the exhibit, which was created by the Field Museum in Chicago, has received a warm (and melty) reception at its other stops, including Los Angeles, Honolulu, New York City and Philadelphia.

"It's a great family topic," says Linda Abraham-Silver, president and executive director of the GLSC. "It's one of those topics that reach across generations."

Not just generations. Devotion to chocolate is a constant across ages of human development — even the ancient Mayans were taking the noble cacao bean and

turning it into a spicy chocolate drink, though it didn't bear much resemblance to the modern Swiss Miss we swill on chilly nights. Through this interactive, multimedia exhibit, visitors will discover what chocolate has meant to different cultures throughout time — from a ceremonial, spiritual experience for Aztec warriors to a sweetened beverage for the privileged elite in yesterday's Europe.

It's not only about the history — it also explores what chocolate means to modern Americans. Along with Europeans and Mexicans, we find more uses for chocolate

THE HISTORY OF CHOCOLATE

CHOCOLATE IS MORE THAN JUST A SWEET TREAT. This "food of the gods" is a culinary chameleon that can add spice, flavor and depth to a variety of dishes. The Cleveland Museum of Natural History is highlighting this flexibility with *The Natural History of Chocolate* on Feb. 9. The seven-course dinner, including a discussion with a culinary specialist from Nestlé, will be whipped up by Pamela Waterman and Brad Schmid, owners of Duet Fine Catered and Prepared Foods in Rocky River.

Dishes will include cacao-cured lox, cacao-smoked salmon and ceviche, a cacao-crust rabbit loin and a white chocolate froth dessert.

"It's amazing what you can do with an ingredient that comes in a big pod," Waterman says. "Who would have thought that something that looks so funny hanging off of a tree can be used in so many ways?" — TW

Tickets are \$150 per person. For more information, call (216) 231-1177 or visit www.cmnh.org.

