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Cocoa Creation

By Brandi Shaffer | June 2nd, 2017

Two pastry chefs at Farmington Country Club, Charlottesville, Va., created a 603-lb. train named the Farmington Express made entirely of milk, white and dark chocolate.

For major holidays, including Halloween and the 4th of July, the culinary department at **Farmington Country Club** in Charlottesville, Va., creates a themed chocolate sculpture, with the Christmas creation always ranking as the “largest and most impressive one throughout the year,” says Communications Manager Marcia Chipperfield.

For Christmas 2016, two pastry chefs outdid themselves (an impressive feat, given that the 2015 effort was a 300-lb., six-foot-tall nutcracker, in addition to the annual gingerbread house). Assistant Pastry Chef Megan Bamford and SSG (Staff Sergeant) Rose Picard invested 120 hours to create a 603-lb. train named the Farmington Express that was made entirely of milk, white and dark chocolate.

THE GOAL: Carry on a tradition of intricately detailed chocolate structures for the holidays at Farmington CC.

THE PLAN: Build a 603-lb. train over the course of 120 hours made entirely of milk, white and dark chocolate, and maintain the display for a month in Peacock Alley, a well-traveled entryway into the club's ballroom.

THE PAYOFF: Pride among members in the club staff's abilities, as well as a “great conversation piece” that often serves as a backdrop of photos taken by members.

at Farmington to make sure the train was a success was crucial,” Chipperfield says. “For example, the catering team provided the time and space for construction, our maintenance team assisted with the engineering, and our banquet team secured the sculpture during many high-traffic Christmas events.”

Maintaining the train's structural integrity was one of the biggest challenges, Chipperfield adds. “Creating something made of 100% chocolate to sit for a month in a room that fluctuates in temperature was one of the largest obstacles,” she explains.

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The Farmington Express weighed in at 603 lbs., made entirely of milk, white and dark chocolates. The structure took 120 hours for two pastry chefs to complete.

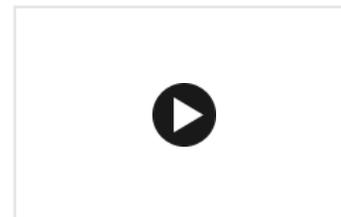
Inspired by a wooden toy train that Bamford's grandfather made for her as a child, the sculpture featured smoke stacks, engine details, an elaborate bow, wheels, and a “cowcatcher,” all made from 100% chocolate.

Of course, the Express wasn't just the result of the efforts of the pastry chefs—it took an entire team to ensure that the sculpture could be on display in the Peacock Alley area of the club's ballroom throughout the month of December.

“Coordinating with a large portion of the staff



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The annual chocolate structures are not eaten, but to ensure that the elaborate creations don't go to waste, the Farmington staff melts down the chocolate from the displays for each holiday so they can be transformed into something new the next year. It takes about 4 to 5 hours to chop up the chocolate, melt it down, and store it for the next holiday, Chipperfield says.

Establishing a festive atmosphere during the holidays is a priority for Farmington, and the chocolate sculptures go a long way toward not only creating that ambiance, but giving members something to be proud of—not to mention something to “ooh and ahh” at.

“Because of how authentic the sculptures looked, many passersby didn't realize they were made completely out of chocolate,” says Chipperfield. “A sign is posted near the sculpture that explains what it is and the process [of making it]. It is a great conversation piece as members and their guests enter events, and several members use it as a backdrop for having pictures taken.”



Intricate details, including a chocolate bow, “cow-catcher” and smoke stacks, proved to be the most impressive elements of the Farmington Express train.

INSTANT IDEA

After seeing a Youtube video, **Champions Run** in Omaha, Neb., was inspired to buy its own giant inflatable hamster ball, pair it with inflatable bowling pins, and designate a spot on the driving range for an evening of Human Bowling. The pop-up event was advertised on the club's social media pages, and the excitement around it has encouraged members to check in more with the club's Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter feeds.



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